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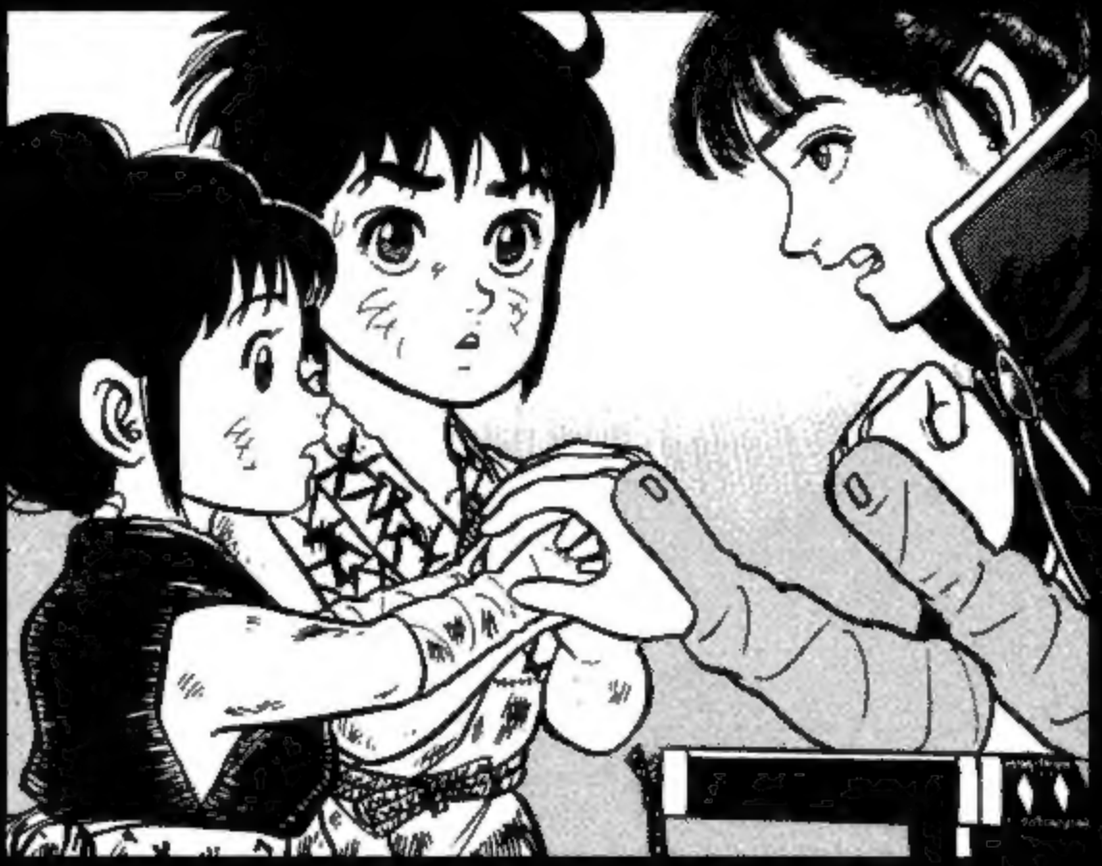

Azumi

23. The Snow And The Farewell

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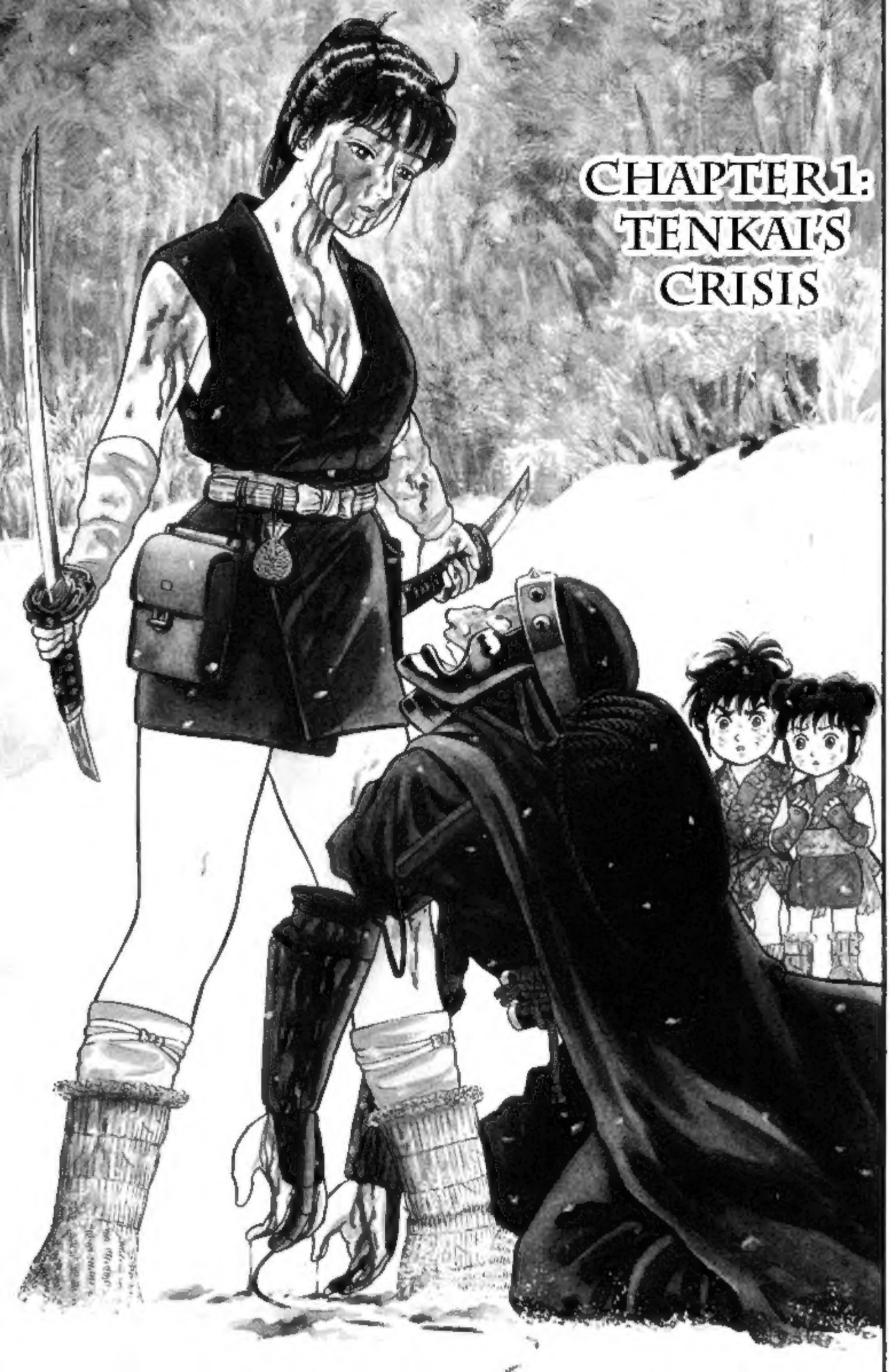
CHAPTER 1:
TENKAI'S
CRISIS

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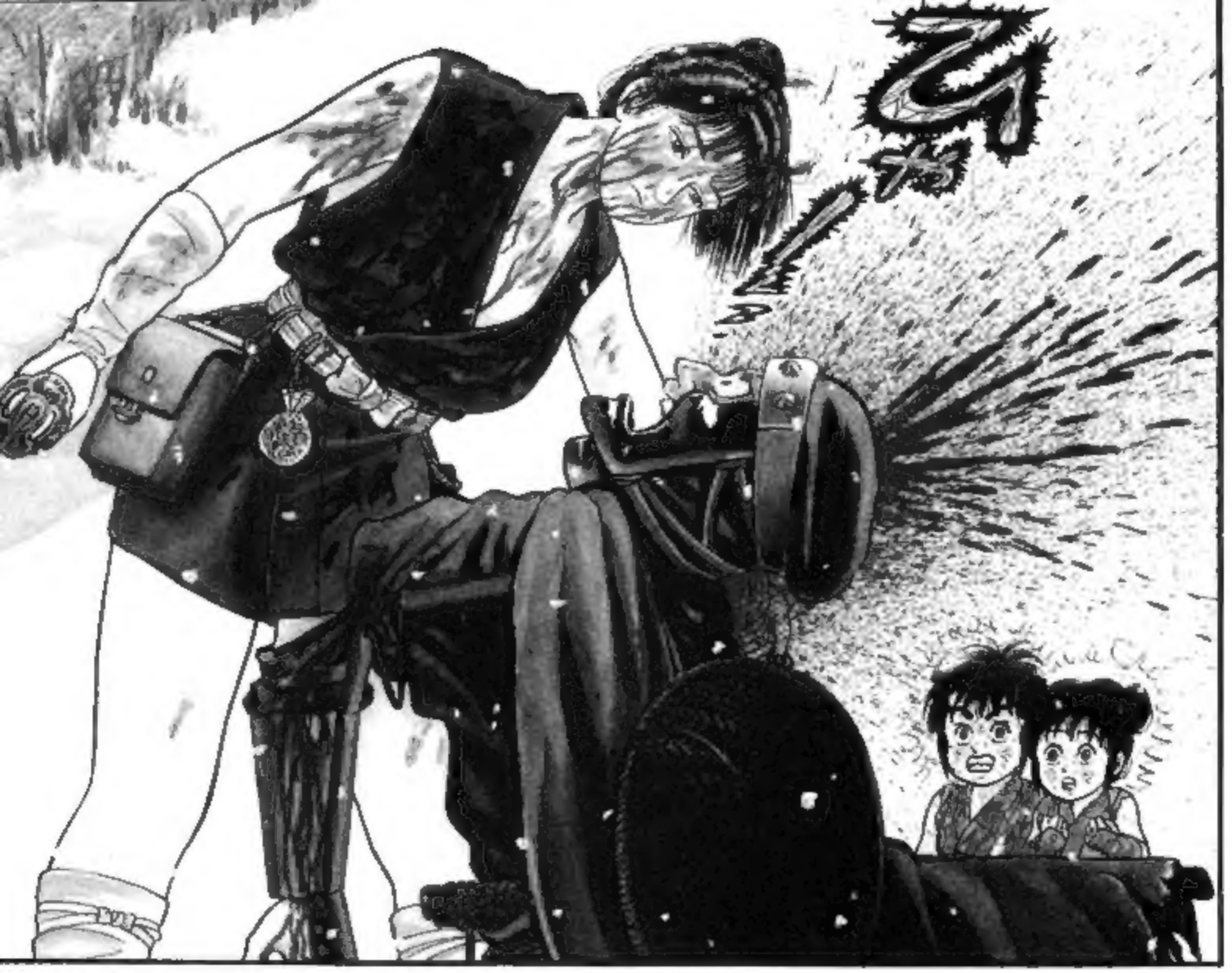

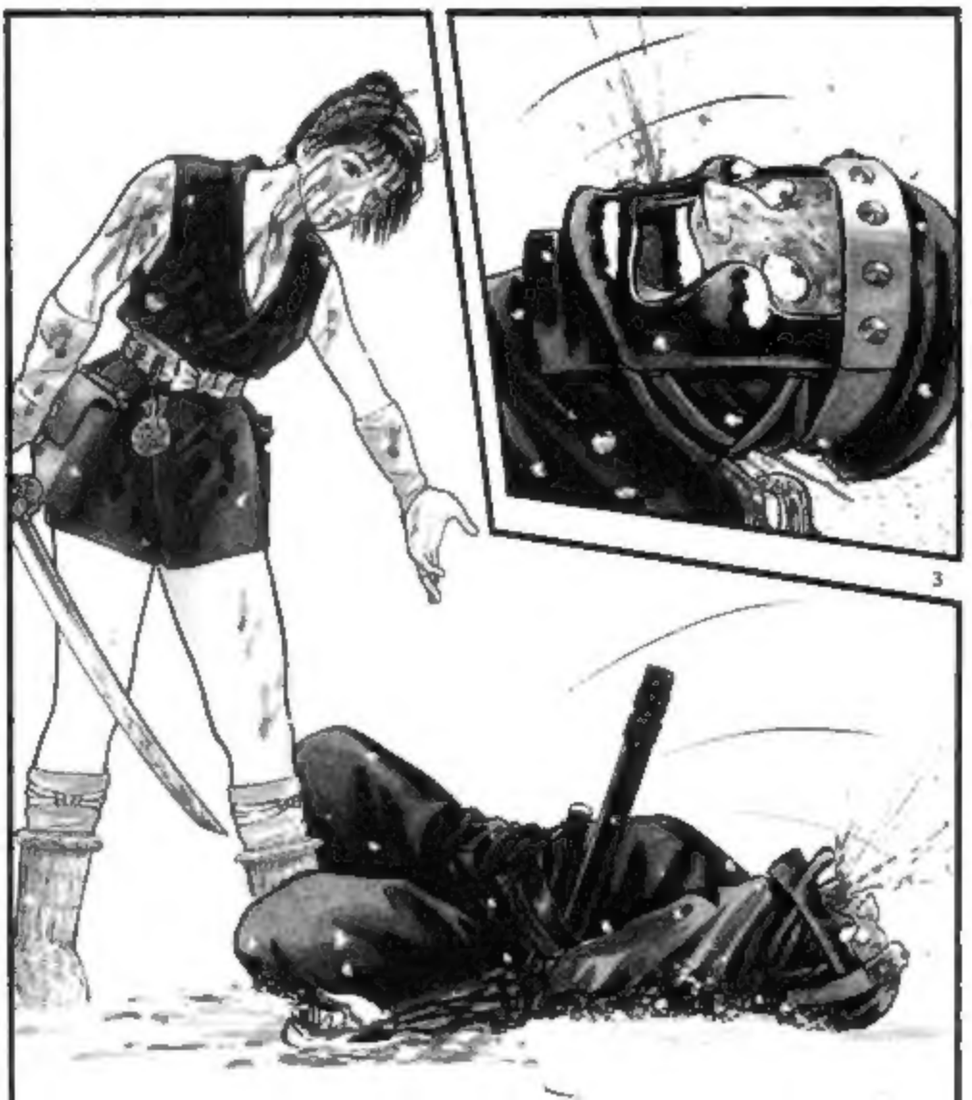

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THANK YOU SO MUCH!
THANK YOU...
THANK YOU...
AZUMI-NEECHAN...

ドカカ
バカカ
AZUMI-DONOO OOOO!
THANK GOD I WON...
.....

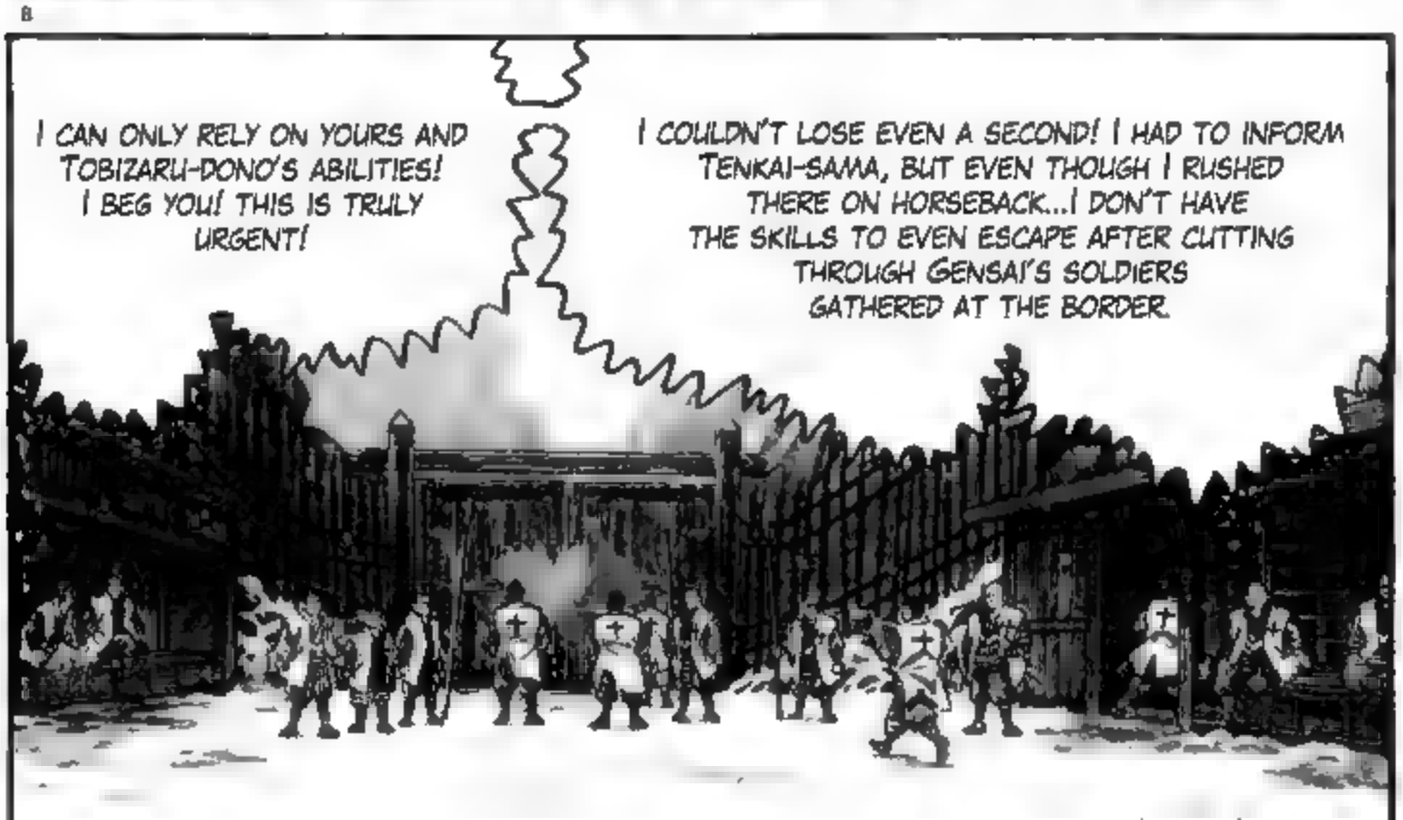
AZUMI-DONO!

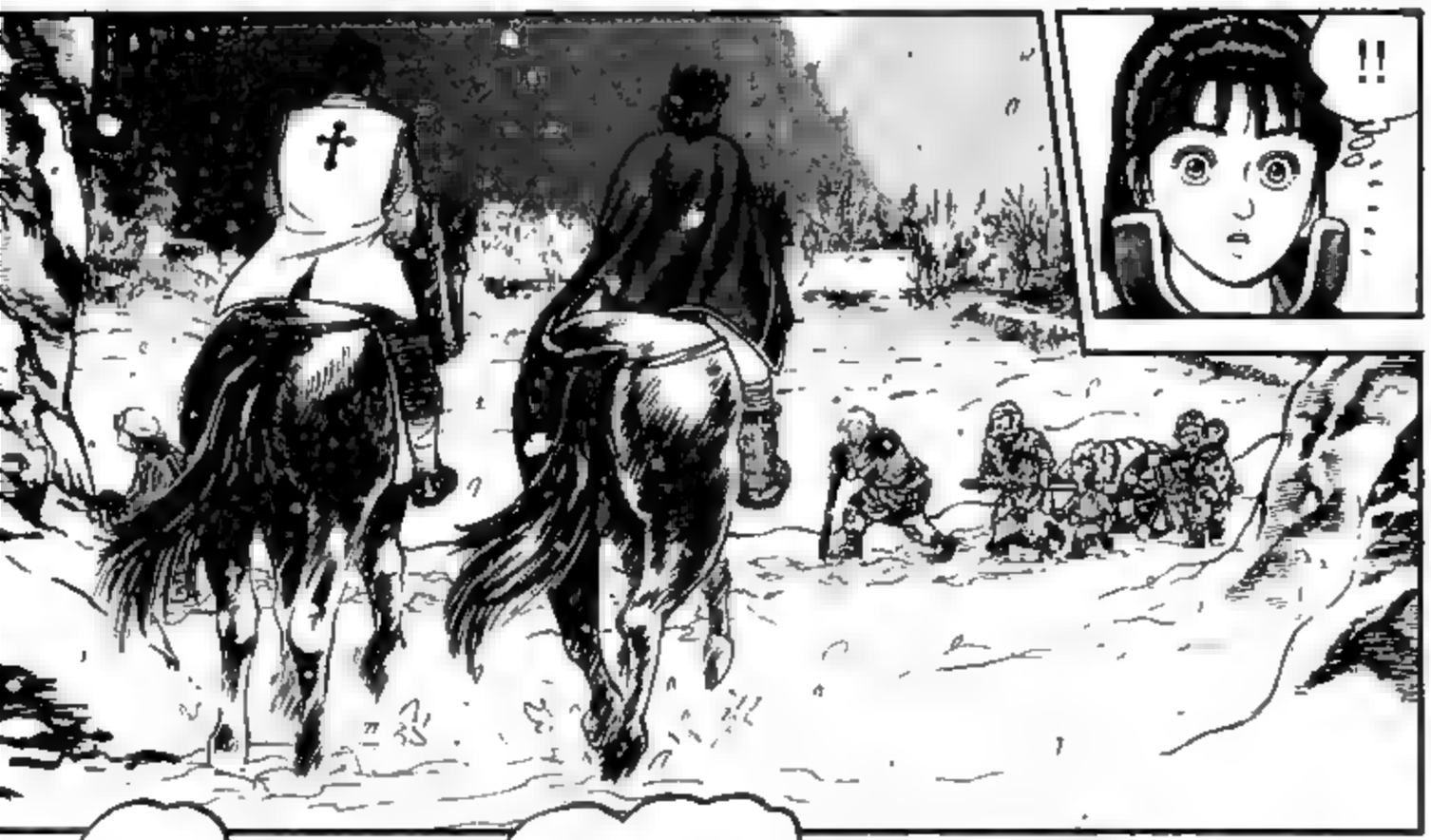
I COULD NOT FIND YOU OR TOBIZARU-DONO, BUT I FOUND
WITH THE SITUATION HAVING BECOME UNTENABLE, I RUSHED TO YOU IN ALL HASTE!
THE LETTER OF CHALLENGE YOU WROTE AND LEFT AT THE BACK DOOR, AND SO I LEARNED YOU WERE HERE!
I HAD INFILTRATED THIS COUNTRY LONG BEFORE YOU! I'VE BEEN WORKING AS A MESSENGER BETWEEN TENKAI-SAMA AND TOBIZARU-DONO!

TO SUPPRESS THIS INSURRECTION, TENKAI-SAMA IS COMING TO THIS COUNTRY AT THE HEAD OF AN ARMY!
AZUMI-DONO!
BUT GENSAI AND HIS MEN ALREADY KNOW OF THIS!

!!
TO USE CANNONS ON TENKAI-SAMA AND HIS MEN AS THEY PASS THROUGH!
MY GOD! GENSAI AND HIS MEN HAVE GONE TO THE COUNTRY'S BORDER

EH !?
THERE ARE CANNONS POSITIONED AT THE BORDER!
I...I WOULD'VE NEVER EXPECTED THAT THINGS WOULD'VE HAD ESCALATED LIKE THIS...S-SO I HAVEN'T INFORMED TENKAI-SAMA THAT

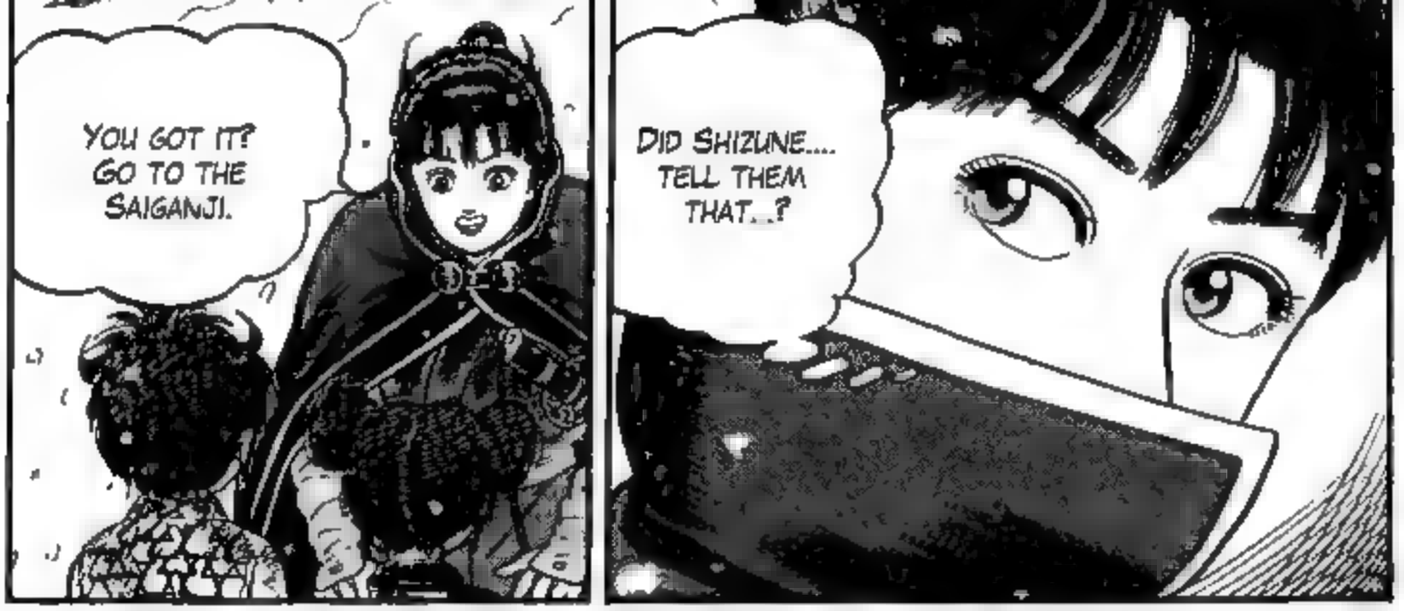

I CAN ONLY RELY ON YOURS AND TOBIZARU-DONO'S ABILITIES! I BEG YOU! THIS IS TRULY URGENT!
I COULDN'T LOSE EVEN A SECOND! I HAD TO INFORM TENKAI-SAMA, BUT EVEN THOUGH I RUSHED THERE ON HORSEBACK...I DON'T HAVE THE SKILLS TO EVEN ESCAPE AFTER CUTTING THROUGH GENSAI'S SOLDIERS GATHERED AT THE BORDER.


!!

WHERE ARE THEY GOING?
WHAT...? THE BEDRIDDEN...THE ELDERLY...EVEN THE CHILDREN...

HEY! IS IT TRUE SHIZUNE-SAMA WILL SUMMON GOD AT THE GOLD MINE!?
OKAY !?
WE'RE SPLITTING UP HERE, GO WHERE TAE-CHAN WAS WAITING, AT THE SAIGANJI!!
YES, IT IS! SHIZUNE-SAMA HAS BEEN SAYING THAT!

WHEN THE HOLY WAR IS OVER, IT SEEMS THAT GOD, CALLED BY SHIZUNE-SAMA, WILL DESCEND AT THE GOLD MINE TO TAKE WITH HIM TO HEAVEN THE SOULS OF THE PEOPLE WHO DIED IN THE HOLY WAR!
AZUMI-DONO!
AZUMI-DONO! WE MUST HURRY!


YOU GOT IT? GO TO THE SAIGANJI.
DID SHIZUNE.... TELL THEM THAT...?

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ドガガガッ
THAT'S NO GOOD! EVEN IF YOUR LEGS HURT, YOU MUST GO!! SHIZUNE-SAMA SAID THAT WE MUST ALL GO, LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND!!
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THAT'S WHY YOU GOTTA GO THERE, GRANNY!
HE SAID THAT ALL THE PEOPLE WHO COULDN'T PARTICIPATE IN THE HOLY WAR MUST GATHER AT THE GOLD MINE!
ド"ガ"ガ"ガ"ガ"ッ

JUST WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING...?
SHIZUNE...YOU'RE GATHERING ALL THE ELDERLY AND THOSE WHO CAN'T FIGHT AT THE GOLD MINE...

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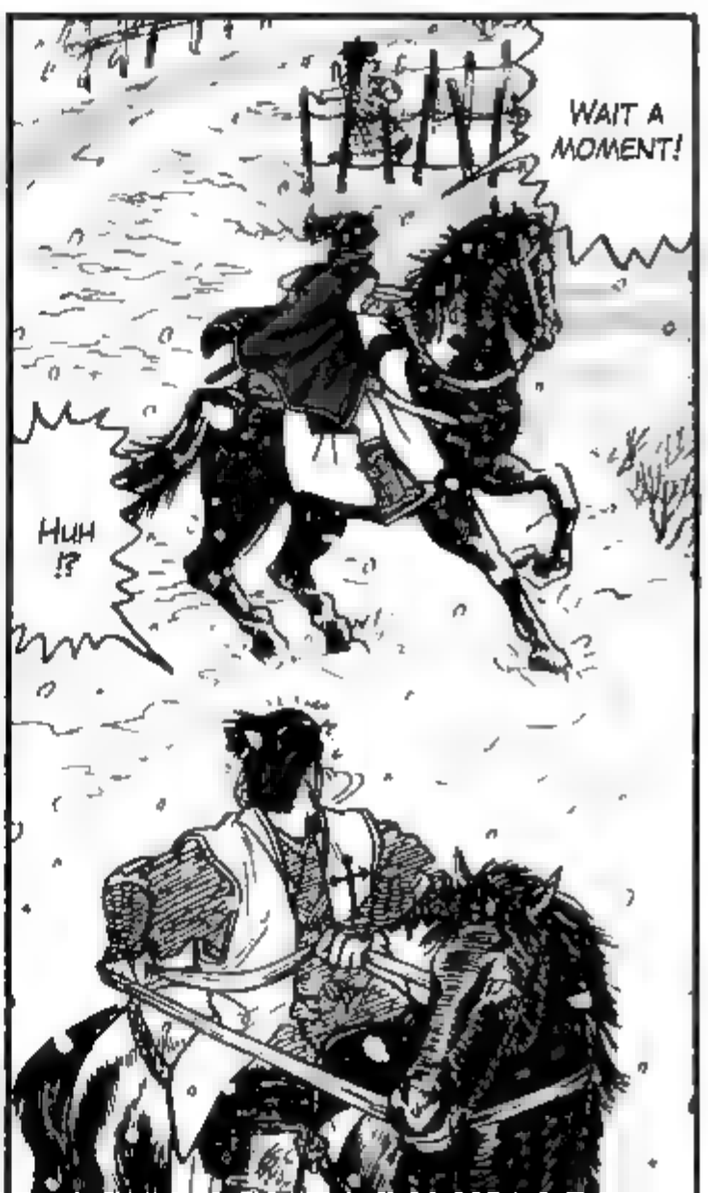
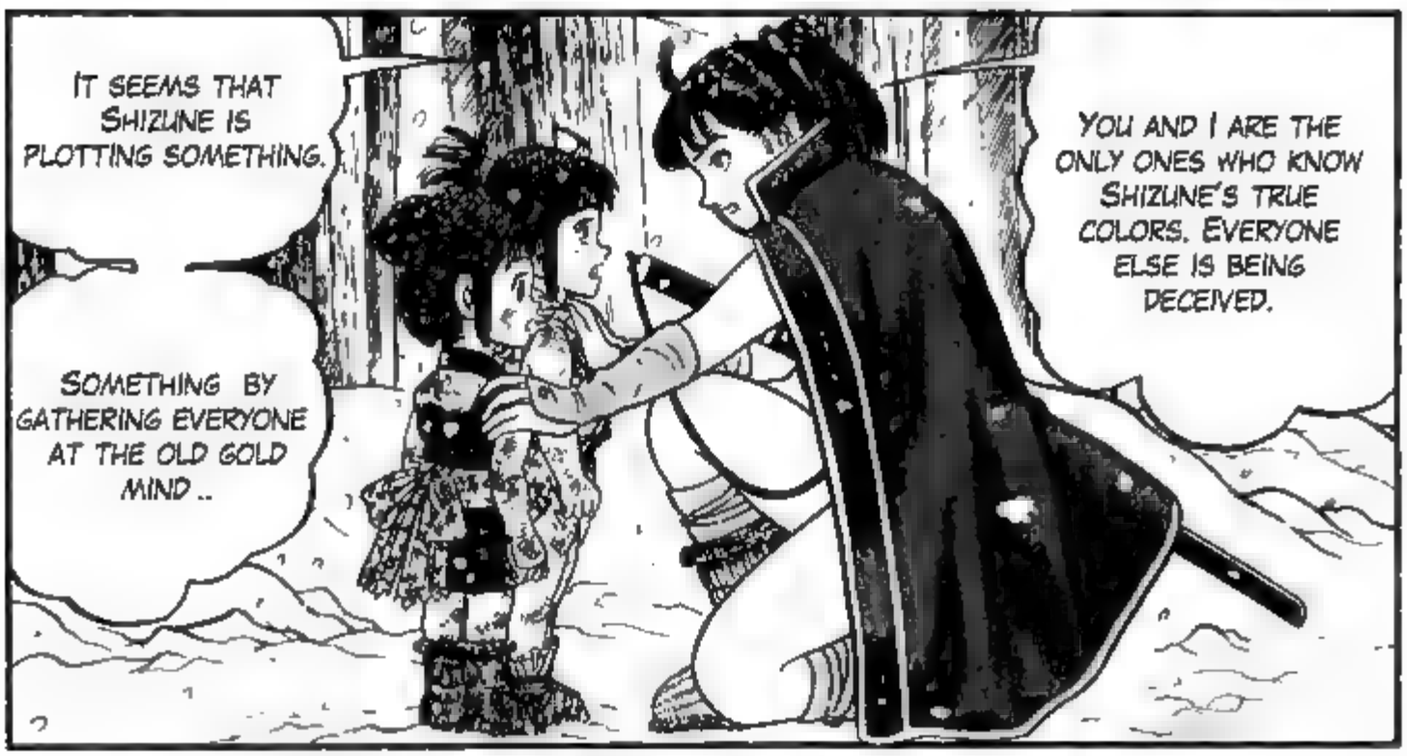
A...
AZUMI-DONO!
WE MUST HURRY OR TENKAI-SAMA-!


WAIT A MOMENT!
HUH !?

GACCHI!


IT SEEMS THAT SHIZUNE IS PLOTTING SOMETHING.
SOMETHING BY GATHERING EVERYONE AT THE OLD GOLD MIND ..
YOU AND I ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO KNOW SHIZUNE'S TRUE COLORS. EVERYONE ELSE IS BEING DECEIVED.

GOT IT!? DO THAT FOR ME!

HOWEVER, GACCHI, TAE-CHAN, YOU MUSTN'T GO TO THE GOLD MINE! NO MATTER HOW MUCH THEY INVITE YOU OR BY WHOM YOU'RE INVETED, YOU MUSTN'T GO. WAIT AT THE SAIGANJI.

……
WILL YOU COME TO THE SAIGANJI?
AZUMI-NEECHAN... WILL YOU COME BACK?
ドガガッ
SO-RRY !!!
PLEASE! MAKE HASTE!
YES! I'LL COME FOR SURE!
ドガガッ
ドガガッ
ドガガッ
IF HE WERE TO BE SHOT WITH CANNONS FROM ATOP THE VALLEY AT THE BORDER...

……
ドガガッ
AHHHH ..TENKAI-SAMA HAS NO IDEA THEY HAVE CANNONS!
ドガガッ

HOW LONG AGO DID GENSAI AND THE OTHERS GO TO THE BORDER FROM KAZUNOGAHARA!?... WILL THEY ALREADY BE PREPARING THE CANNONS!?
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ドガガガ

WE CAN'T OUTSTRIP THEM!
I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT WHEN THEY WENT, AND SINCE I'VE FOUND YOU IN A HURRY...THEY SHOULDN'T HAVE HAD TIME TO PREPARE THE CANNONS ALREADY, BUT...
THE BORDER IS FAR FROM HERE!
THE SOLDIERS AT THE BORDER AND INFORM TENKAI-SAMA!
THE ONLY OPTION WE HAVE NOW IS TO CUT THROUGH

I COULD ALSO EASILY BE SHOT BY THE CANNONS FROM ABOVE...
WHEN I CLEAVE THROUGH THE SOLDIERS AT THE BORDER...
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TH-THEN WHAT DO WE DO!?
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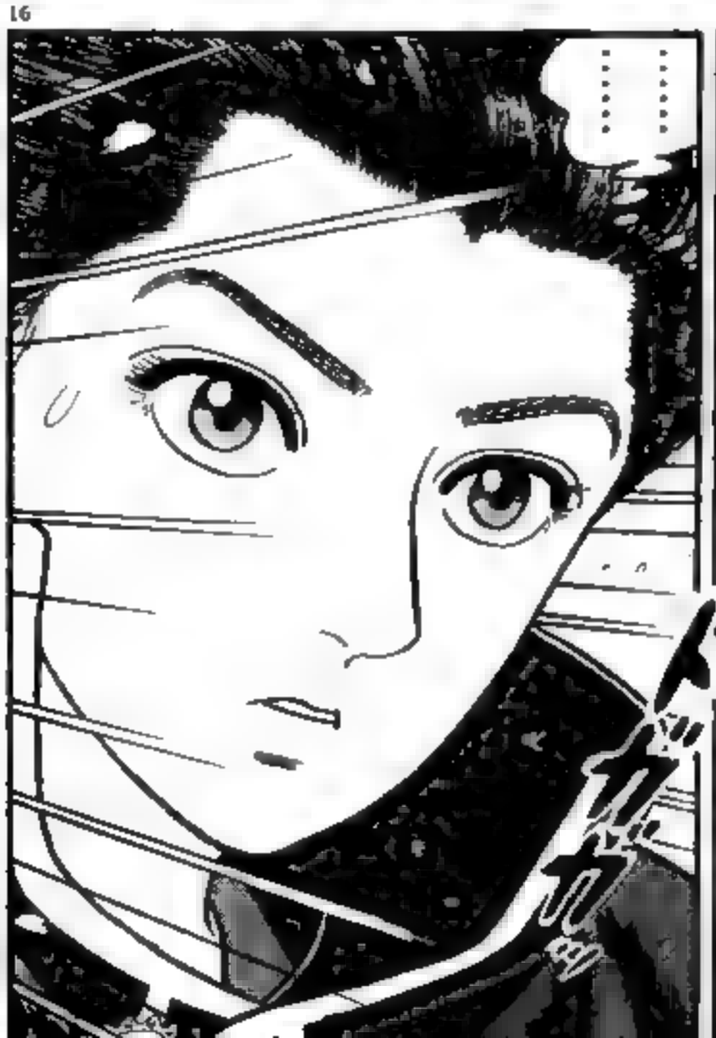
……
ド"
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WE HAVE NO OTHER WAY TO INFORM TENKAI-SAMA OF THE DANGER!
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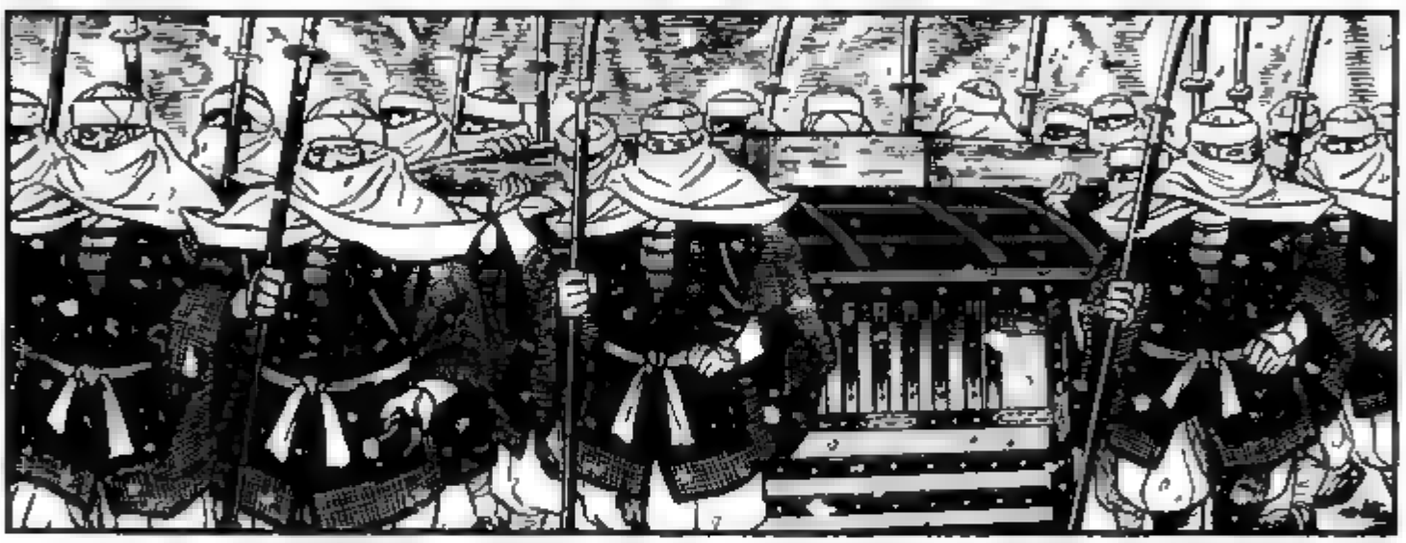

STUBBORNLY MAKE YOUR OWN CHOICES AND DECIDE FOR YOURSELF!
YOU MUST NOT BELIEVE IN THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY IINFITLRATED TOO MUCH.

.....
IF GESSAI BROUGHT YOU UP UNDER HIS CARE AS AN ELITE WARRIOR,
I FEEL THAT
YOU ARE A WARRIOR I CAN RELY ON AND ENTRUST EVERY-THING TO!

IN CASE THERE ARE SIGNS OF AN INSURREC-TION LIKE THE REPORTS SAY,
I FULLY EXPECT YOU TO BE CAPABLE OF STOPPING THE REVOLT BY SLAYING THE CORE INSTIGATORS.
IF THE REVOLT HAPPENS, THERE'LL BE HUNDREDS OR THOUSANDS OF CASUALTIES...
YOU MUST PREVENT THAT BEFORE IT OCCURS!

EVEN SOMEONE LIKE AZUMI COULD NOT STOP THEM...

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO HER...?
SO...
WHAT IS TOBIZARU DOING NOW?
AND SHUNJIRŌ.. TO WHOM I ENTRUSTED THE GOLD MINE?
ARE THEY SAFE NOW!?

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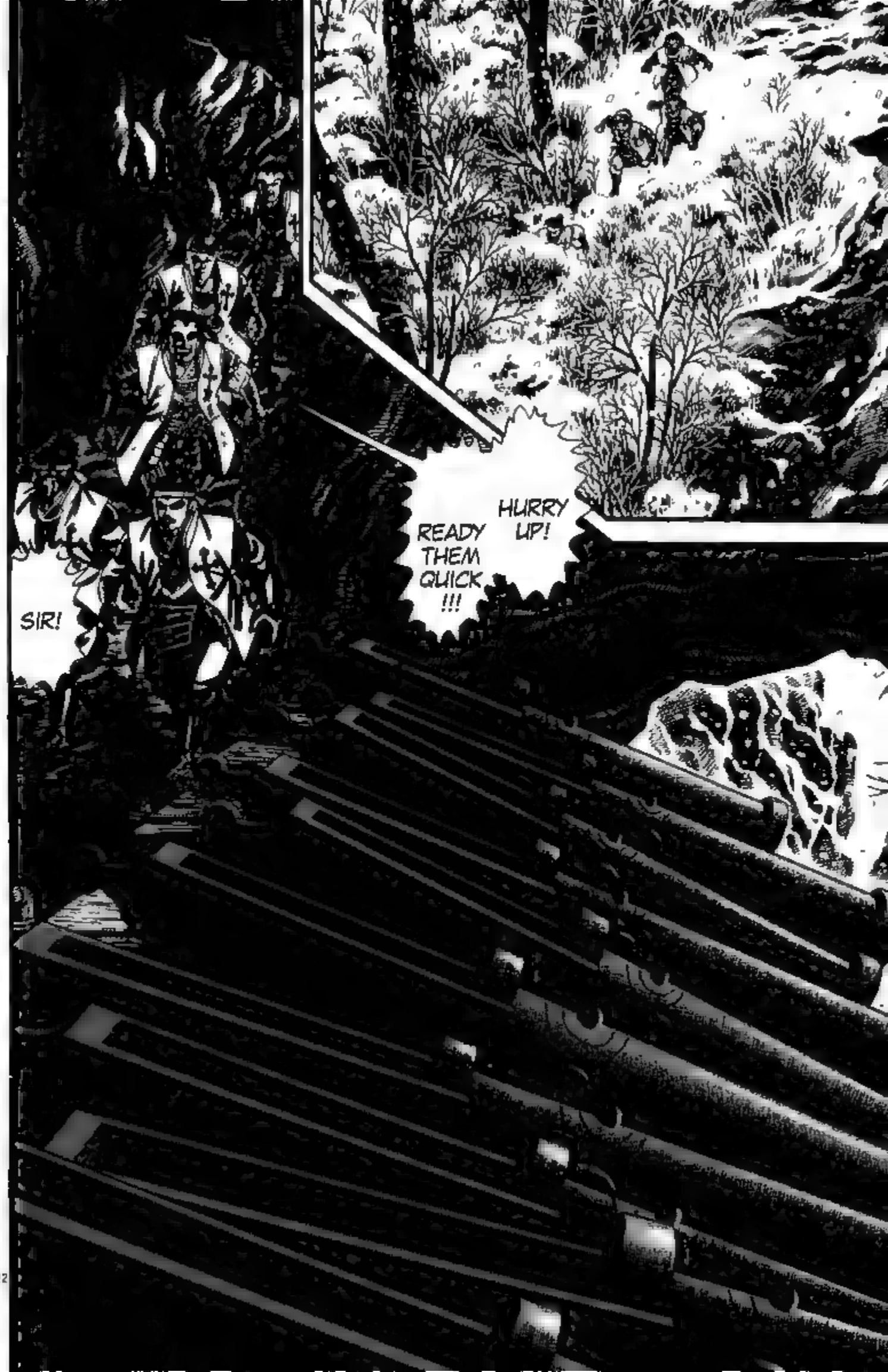
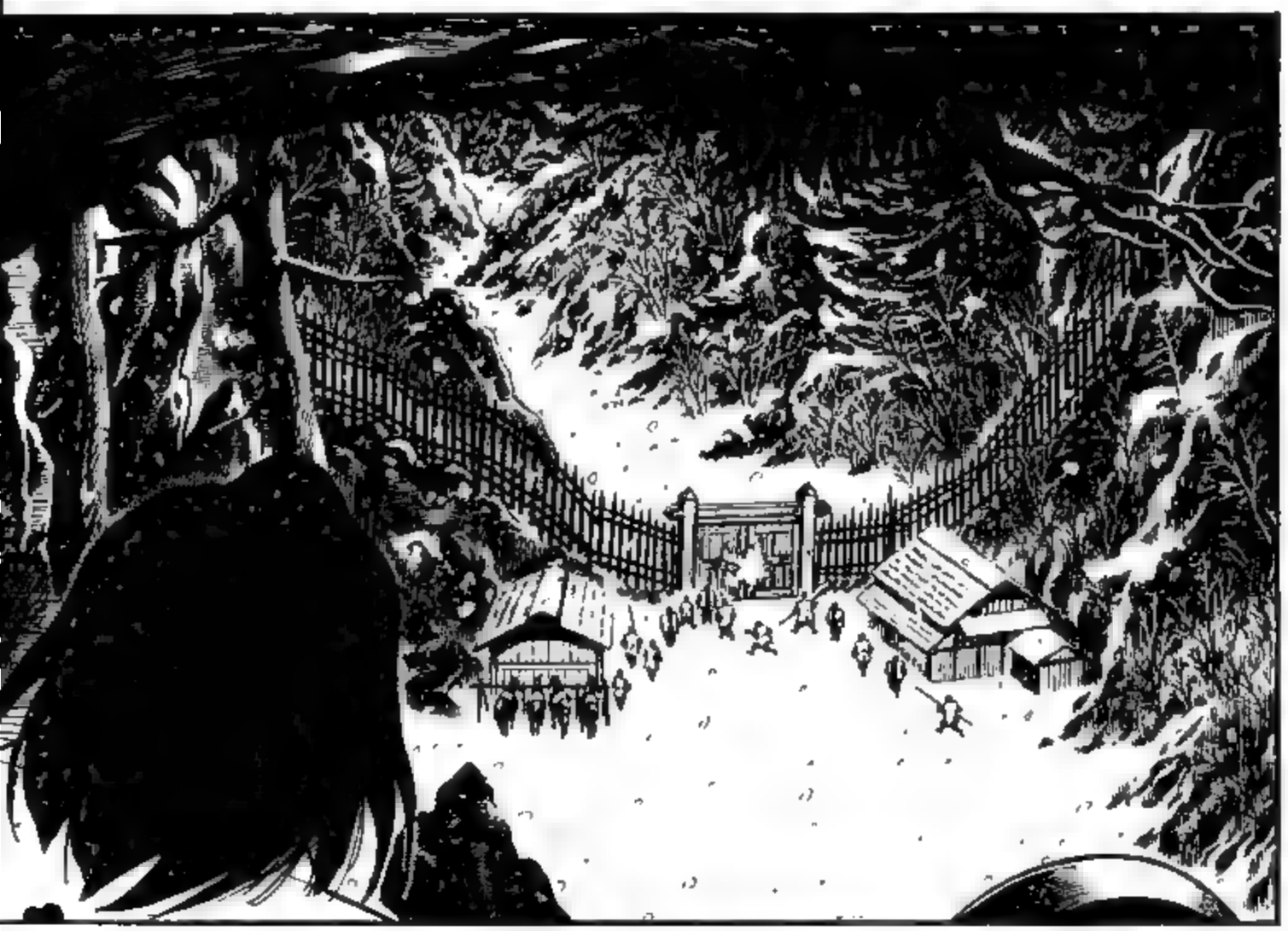
TENKAI IS COMING AT THE HEAD OF A LARGE ARMY!
MOVE! MOVE!
IF THEY END UP ENTERING HERE, WE'RE ALL DOOMED!

DAMN YOU TO HELL, TENKAI!
YOU'LL SEE!
MOO OOO OVE!
WAHAHAHA HAHAHAHA!
UNDER THE BOOT OF THE TOKUGAWA, OUR SWORN ENEMY!?
WE'D JUST BE TAMED QUIETLY
DID YOU THINK


HURRY UP!
READY THEM QUICK !!!
SIR!



I, TERAZAWA GENSAI, WILL BURY THE HIGH PRIEST WHO MANIPULATES THE WHOLE COUNTRY FROM THE SHADOWS, TENKAI!!
HE IS HEEE EEEE EEEE EEERE !!!!

THE REST OF YOU WILL TAKE OUT THE RIFLES FROM THE SMALL HUT OVER THERE WHERE WE'VE HIDDEN THEM AND FORM THE RIFLE SQUAD!!
GOOD, THE CANNON SQUAD HAS ENOUGH MEN!
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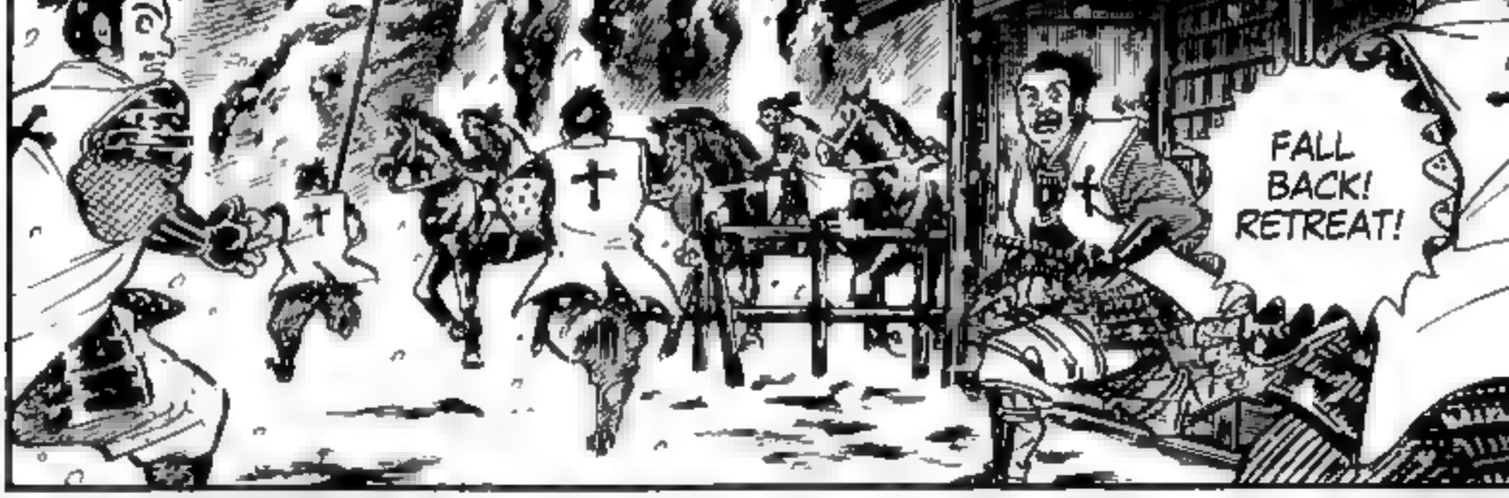
ハア

HERE THEY COME!
TENKAI MUST BE...
INSIDE THE PALA-NQUIN, EH!?

THEY'RE HERE!
LISTEN UP!
DO NOT LET THEM ESCAPE! WAIT UNTIL TENKAI'S PALANQUIN HAS PASSED THROUGH THE GATE AND THEN FIRE!!
GOT IT!?
SIR!

PRIEST SOLD-IERS...
THERE'S A LOT OF THEM...

WHAT DO WE DO?
WHAT TO DO AGAINST SUCH A LARGE ARMY, YOU ASK?
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS? WE FALL BACK!


FALL BACK! RETREAT!

PREPARE THE COALS! QUICKLY!
HURRY !!!

!?
DON'T DELAY-
WIPE THEM ALL OUT! HURRY!
DON'T LET A SINGLE PRIEST SOLDIER INTO THE DOMAIN!
WHAT... IS... THAT?

HEY!
WHAT IS
THAT!?

30

CHAPTER 2:
CONFRONTATION

IT'LL TAKE A LITTLE LONGER!
AREN'T THE COALS READY!?
AH! AZUMI!
NO GOOD! THE GUNS WON'T BE READY IN TIME!
HUH!?
LOOK OUT! AZUMI IS COMING! THAT YOUNG GIRL IS A DEVIL WITH A BLADE!
HURRY AND DRAW YOUR SWORDS!

IS SHE RUNNING ON THE SNOWS!?
WH-WHAT IS THAT !?

UGH!
GUAH!

WHOWHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON!?
KILL HER! KILL HER!!
UGH!
WHAAAAAT!?

EEH!

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ハッ!

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DAMN
YOOO
OOU!

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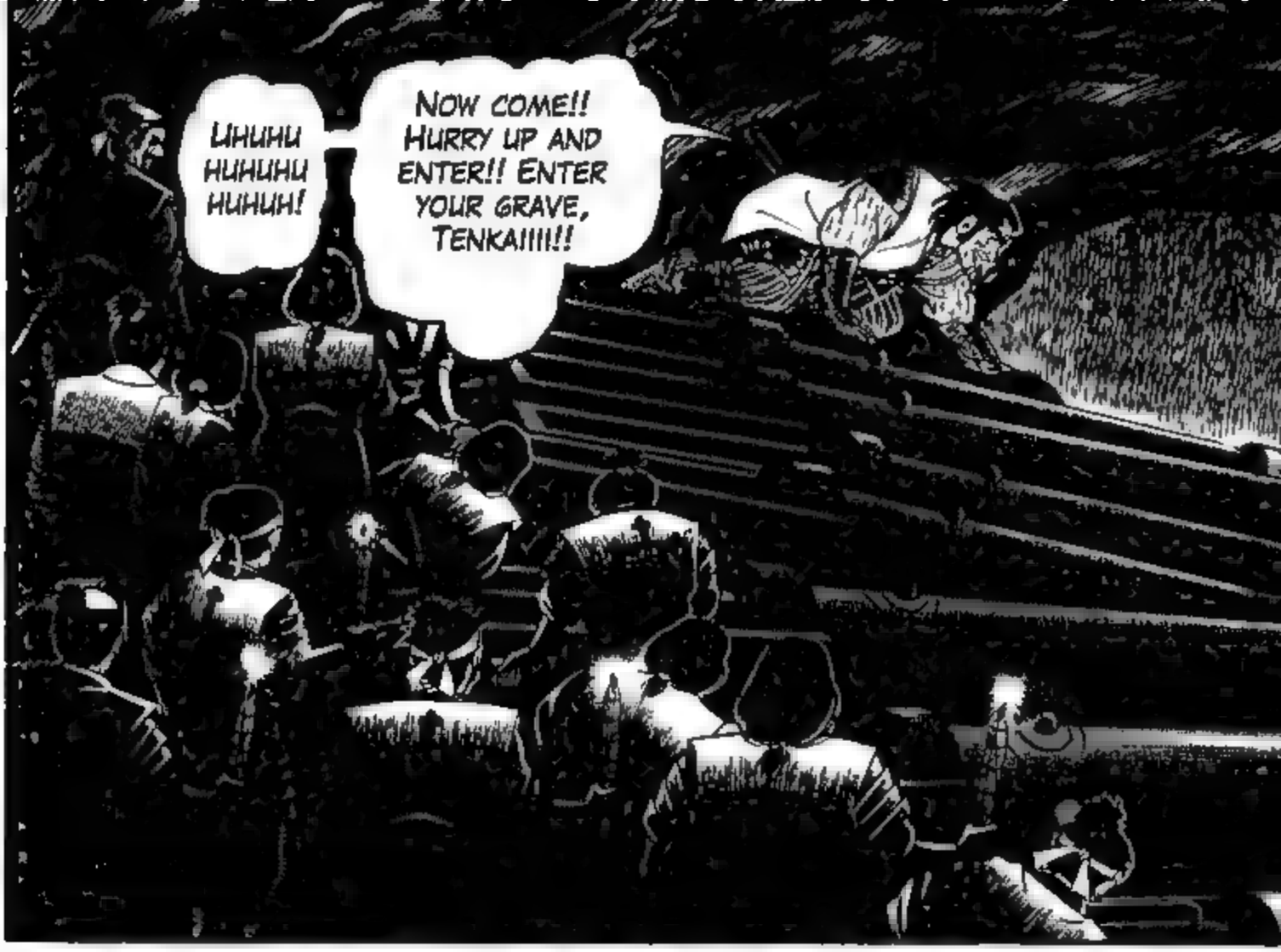
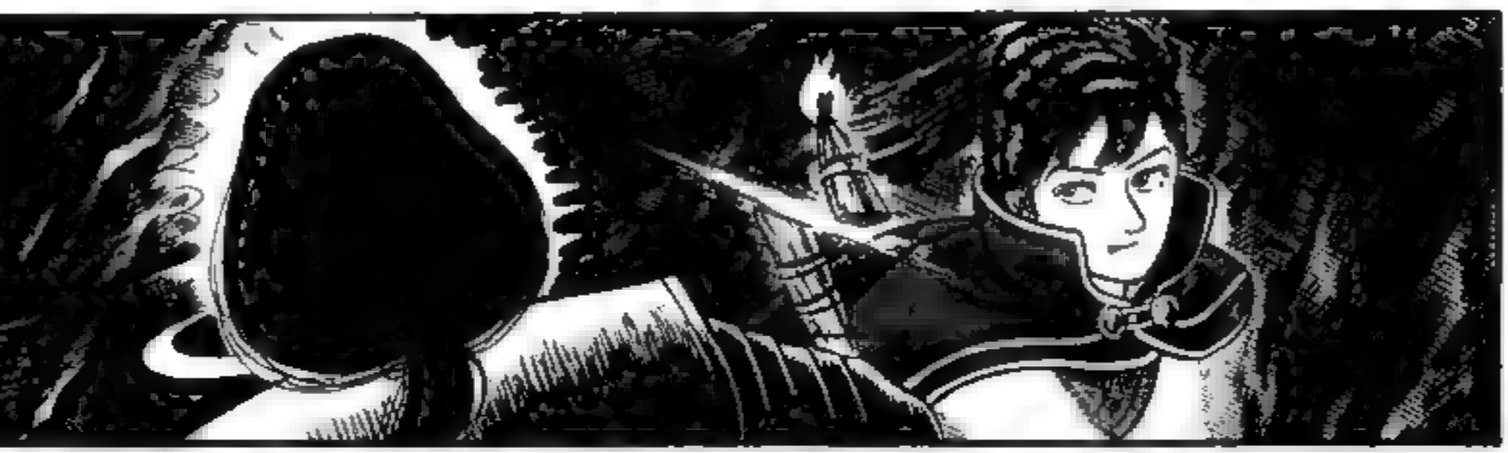
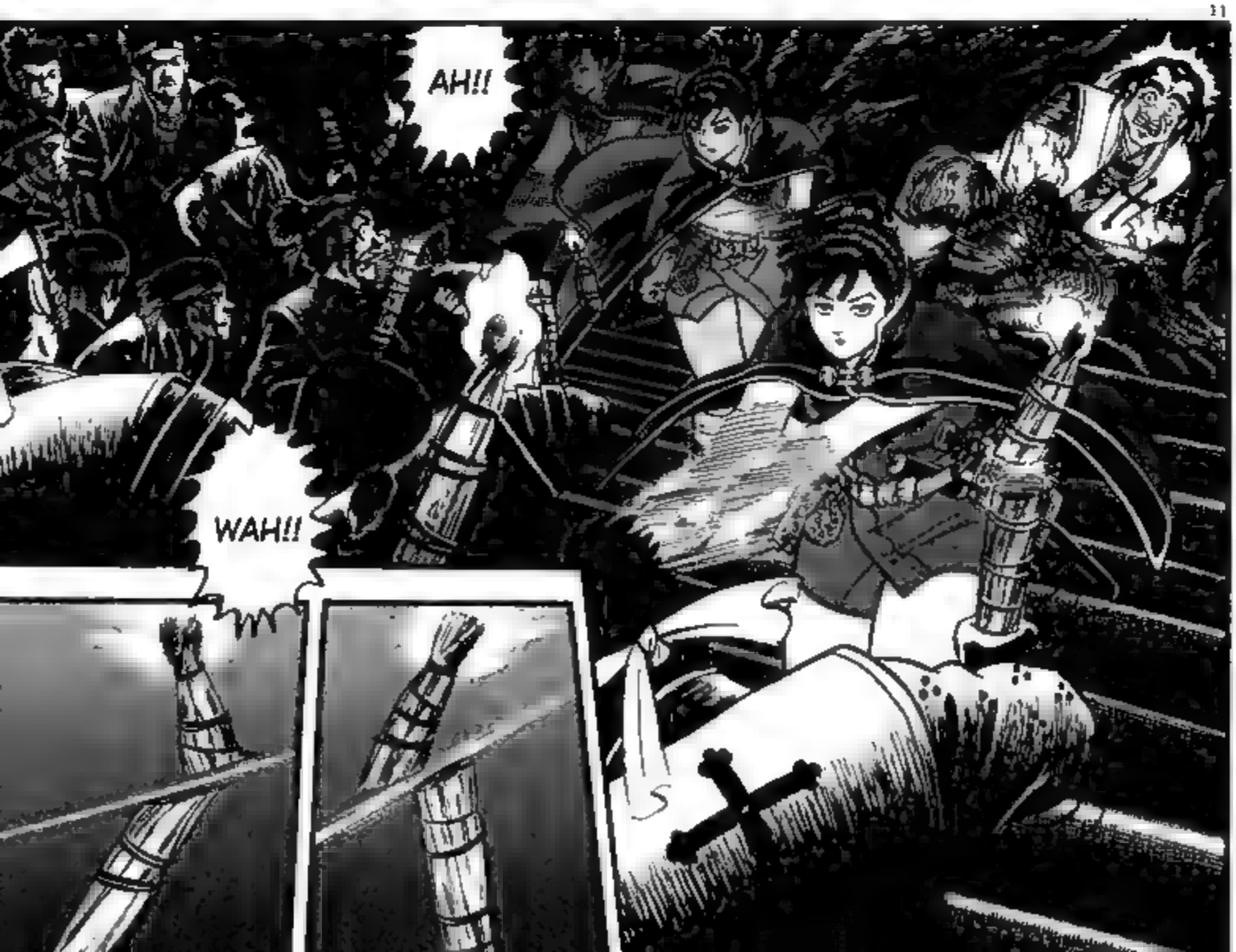

UHUHU HUHUHU HUHUH!
NOW COME!! HURRY UP AND ENTER!! ENTER YOUR GRAVE, TENKA!!!!!

COME !!!
COME NOW!

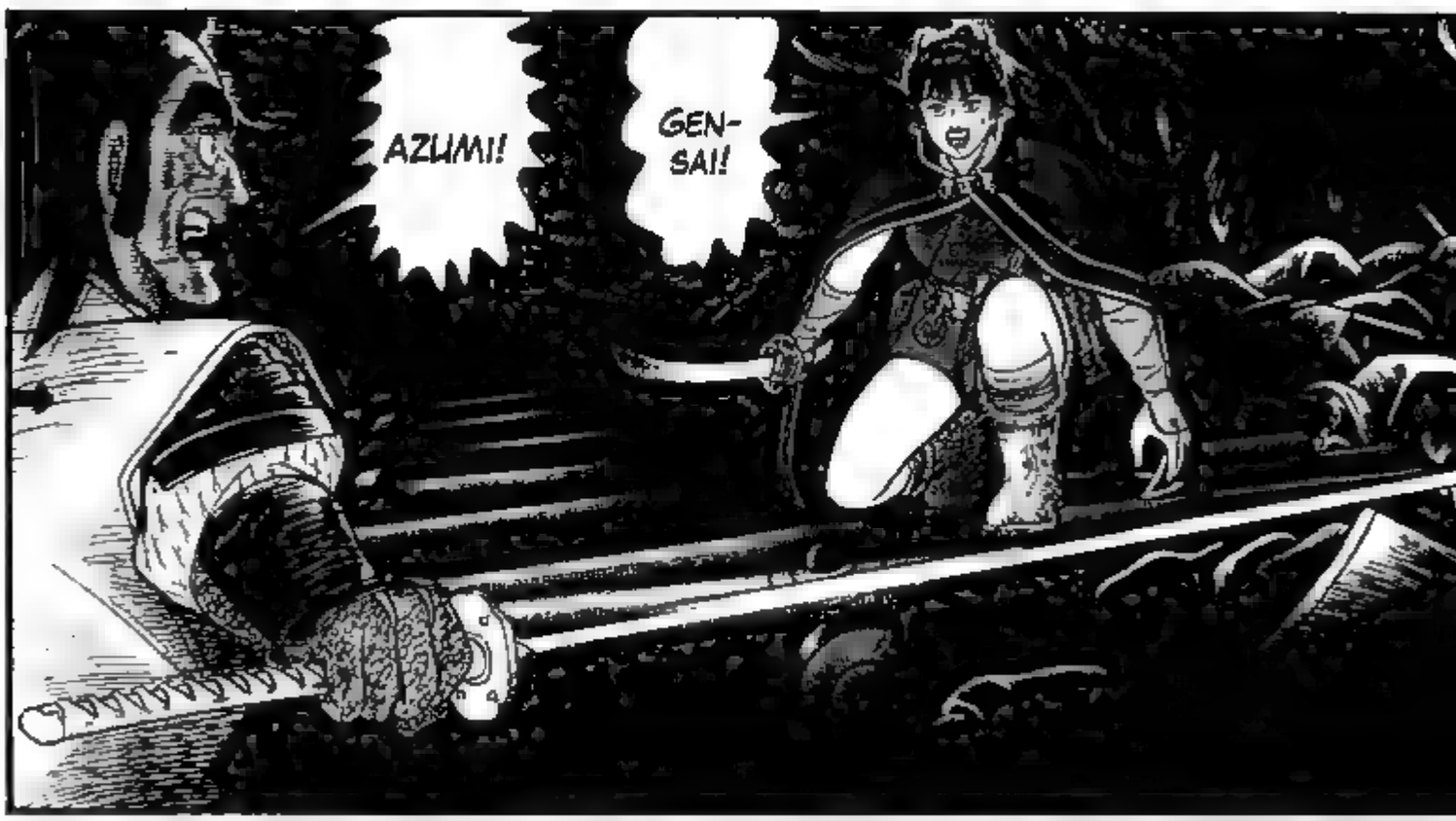
OH!




AH!!
WAH!!

AZU-
MIII!
OOH!
EEE!
WA
AA
AH!

DAMN YOOOU!
OUT OF MY WAA AAY!
AZUU UUUU MIIII!


AZUMI!
GEN-SAI!

.....

DID YOU HAVE ENOUGH OF THE EXCITEMENT FROM THE MASSACRE AT THE BATTLE-FIELD?
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.....
I WILL NOT PERMIT YOU TO CAUSE ANY MORE MASSACRES!
THE RASETSU-GARASU AND THE OTHERS ARE ALL DEAD!

I'VE MADE IT IN TIME!

THE CANNONS AREN'T FIRING!
WHAT HAPP-ENED?
TENKAI-SAMA'S PALANQUIN IS PASSING BY SAFELY!
PERHAPS
AZUMI-DONO CAUGHT UP WITH GENSAI AND HIS MEN?

NOTHING IS HAPP-ENING..
TENKAI-SAMA'S PALANQUIN IS SAFE!

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スッ

AZUMI-DONO!
スッ

!!
AHH! AZUMI-DONO!

THANKS TO YOU, TENKAI-SAMA IS SAFE!
AAAAH! HOW WONDERFUL!
HAS AZUMI-DONO DEALT WITH GENSAI AND HIS MEN!?

EH!?
PLEASE LEND ME YOUR HORSE.
LET'S GO GREET HIM RIGHT AWAY!

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ドガッ
ドガッ

I HAVE TO STOP SHIZUNE'S SCHEMES!

……
Oooo

SHE'S NOT OUTSIDE.
I SEE.

AND IT DOESN'T SEEM SHE'S HIDING INSIDE, EITHER.

SHE DIDN'T AMBUSH US, SO...
IT MEANS SHE WENT TO THE OTHER SIDE...
THERE'RE SMALL FOOT-PRINTS ABOUT...LIKE A CHILD'S.
IT'S UNBELIEV-ABLE, BUT...A BRAT HAS CAME HERE CROSSING THAT VALLEY.

A BRAT, THEN!
IT MUST'VE BEEN THAT BRAT...YES, I'M SURE OF IT!
DID YOU SEE HIM!?

.....

.....

THAT TIME, HE WAS WITH AZUMI..

HMM ...
WHAT DO WE DO?
NEXT TIME, SHE'LL COME WITH REVENGE ON HER MIND...

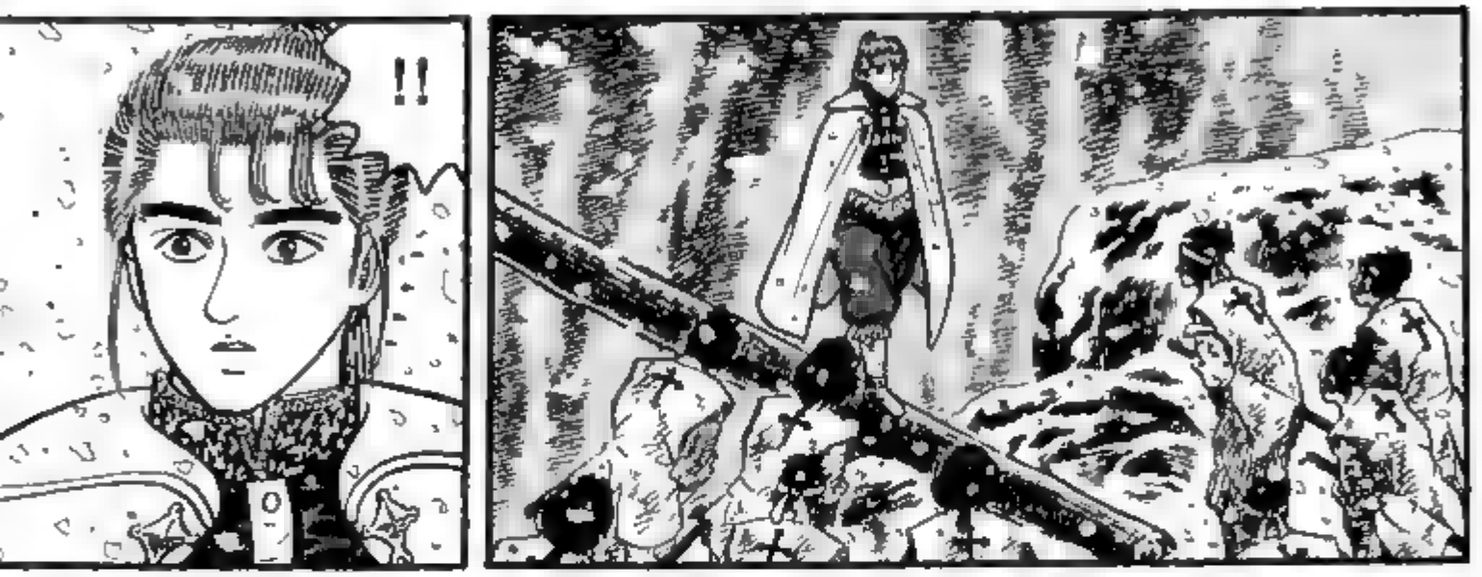
ALL THE PEOPLE HERE WILL MAKE THEMSELVES A SHIELD TO PROTECT THEIR BELOVED LORD SHIZUNE!
THAT'S BECAUSE
IT'S ALRIGHT! AZUMI CAN'T POSSIBLY KILL US!

LOOK. OUR SHIELD HAS OH-SO CONVENIENTLY COME TO RECEIVE US!
THEN LET'S MEET AS DECIDED.
BY THE GOLD MINE.
AYE!
SHIZUNE-SAMA!
AHH!

SHIZUNE-SAMA!! AT THE DECISIVE BATTLE AT KAZUNOGAHARA WE'VE ROUTED THE CASTLE SAMURAIS AND ACHIEVED VICTORY!!
THANK YOU OH SO MUCH!
WE COULD ONLY WIN THANKS TO YOUR DIVINE PROTECTION!

WE CAME TO RECEIVE YOU!
MANY ARE WEARY OF WAITING AND HAVE GONE TO THE GOLD MINE!
SEEMS THE FIRE HAS GONE OUT...

IF I DON'T GET A FIRE READY, I CAN'T USE THE GUNS...
SO IT WENT OUT..


!!

AHHH!? TRY TO KILL YOU!?
A YOUNG GIRL WHO WILL TRY TO TAKE MY LIFE HAS APPEARED!

IF I REMEMBER RIGHT, THAT'S AZUMI-HIME, SO SHE SAID!
WHAT!?
UHM!?

EH!?
I CAME TO KNOW THAT THAT YOUNG GIRL IS AN ASSASSIN WHO RECEIVED THE ORDER TO KILL ME FROM THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE.
A SHOGUNATE ASSASSIN!?

EVEN THOUGH SHE'S A YOUNG GIRL, SHE'S VERY SKILLED. EVERYONE, PLEASE, PROTECT ME.
THE SHOGUNATE WANTS TO KILL ME.
DAAAAMN YOOOOU! ASSASSIN!
TRYING TO KILL SHIZUNE-SAMA! SUCH HEATHEN ARROGANCE!
SHIZUNE-SAMA, PLEASE REST ASSURED!

……

AZ-LUMI!
WILL YOU CUT THROUGH ALL THESE INNOCENT PEOPLE TRYING TO PROTECT ME...?

28

INDEED I WILL!
IF I DON'T, YOU'LL KILL MANY MORE PEOPLE THAN THE ONES HERE!

CHAPTER 3:
FALLEN
ANGEL

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WAH!
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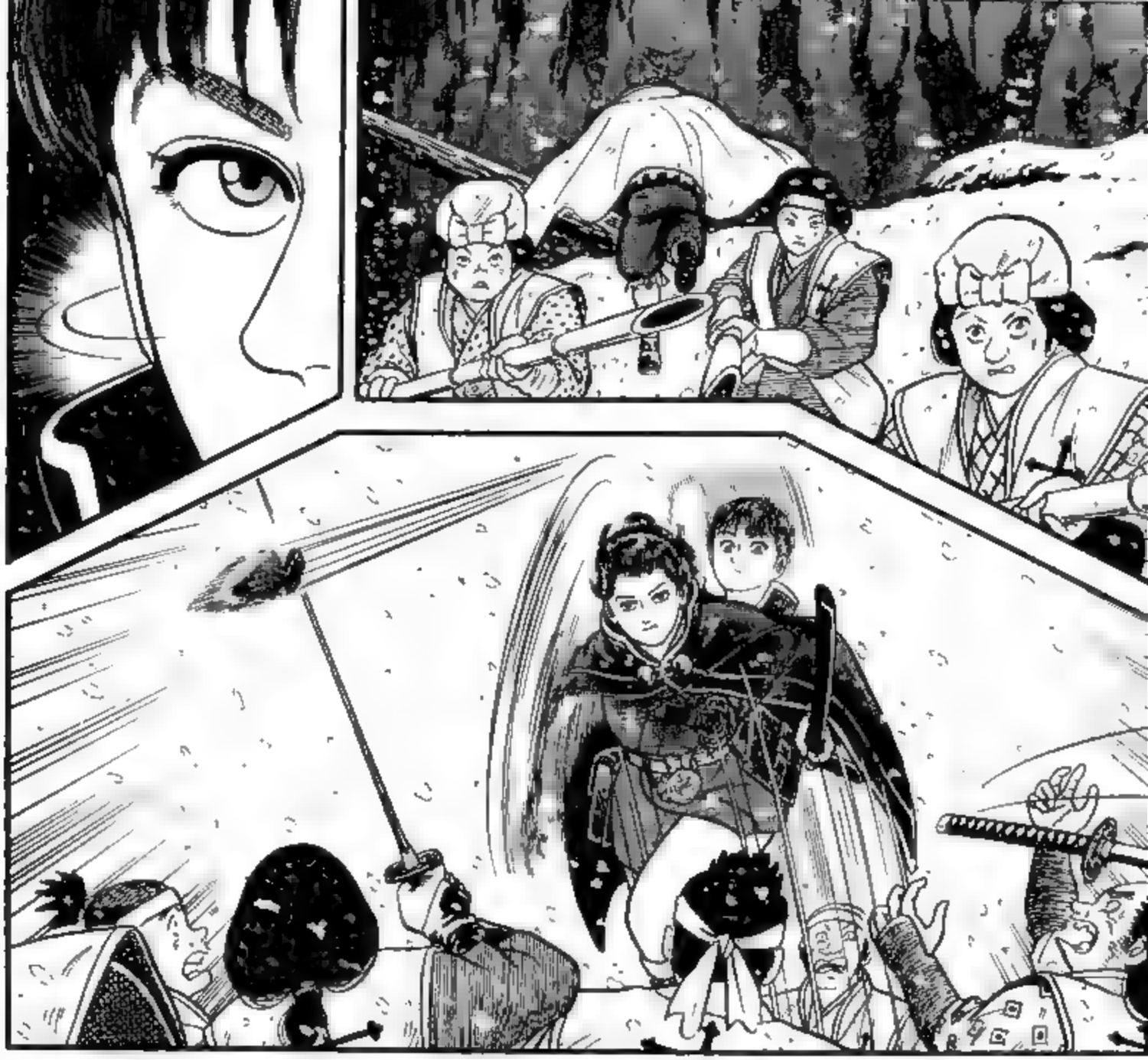
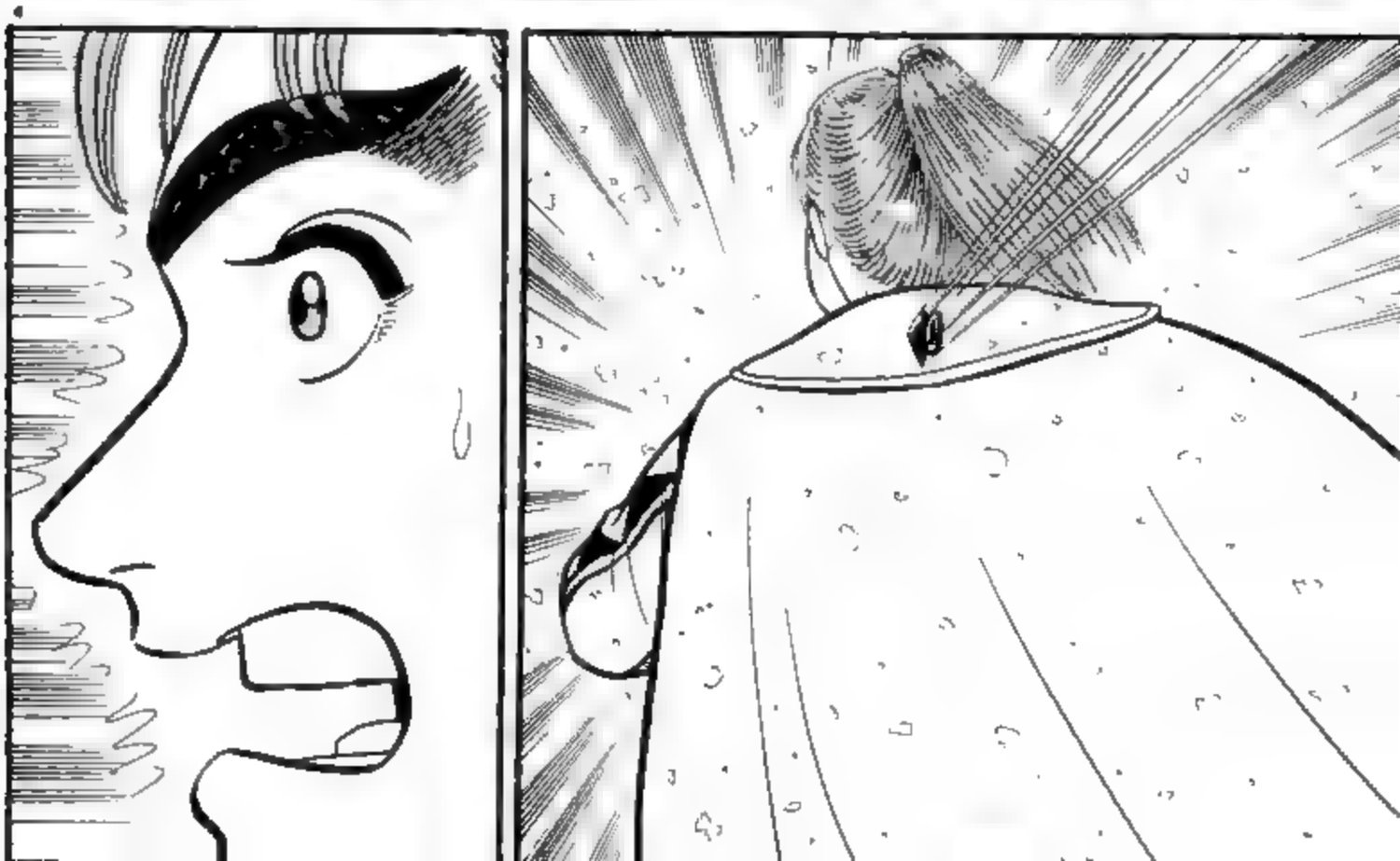
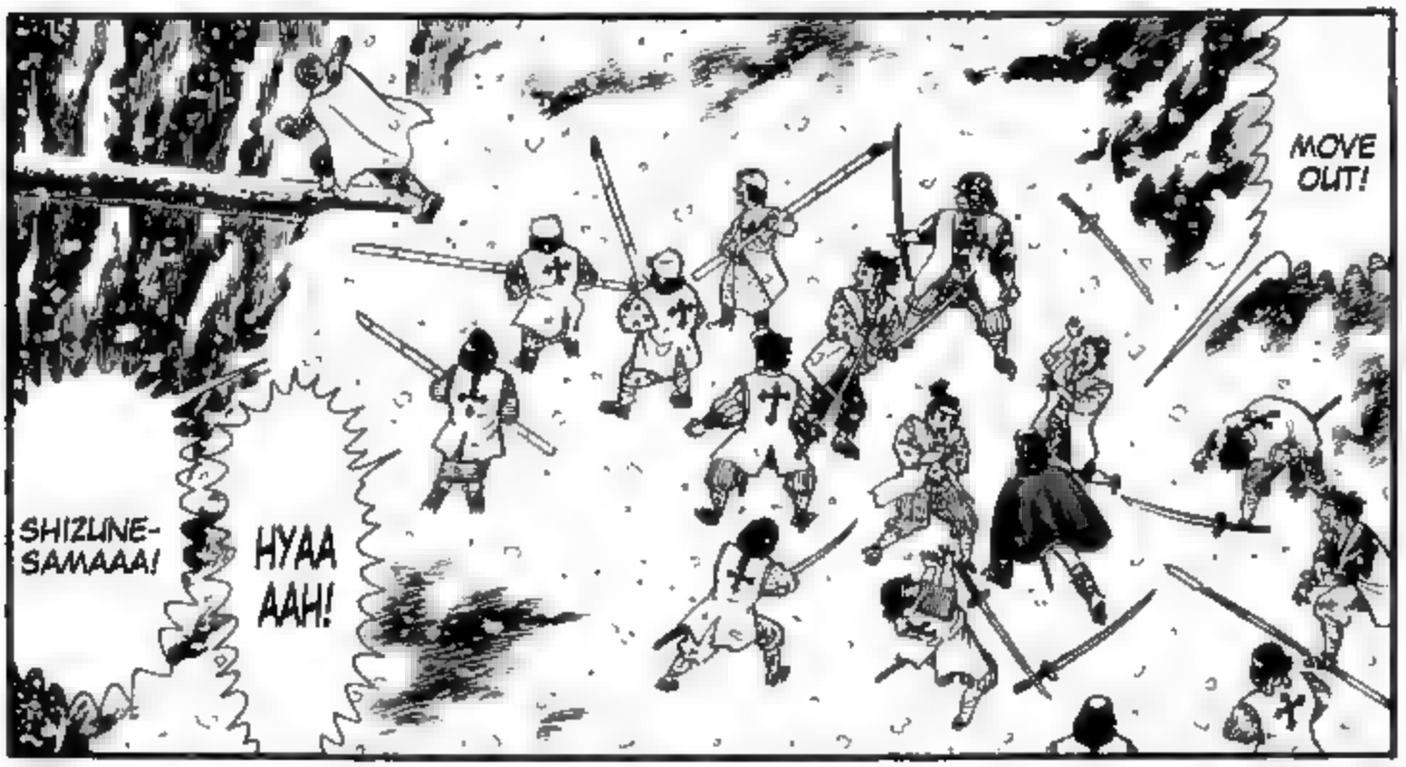
AAH!
GUO OOH!





SHIZUNE-SAMA!!!!
AAA AAH!


MOVE OUT!
SHIZUNE-SAMAAA!
HYAA AAH!

SHIZUNE-SAMA, RUN AWAAAAY!

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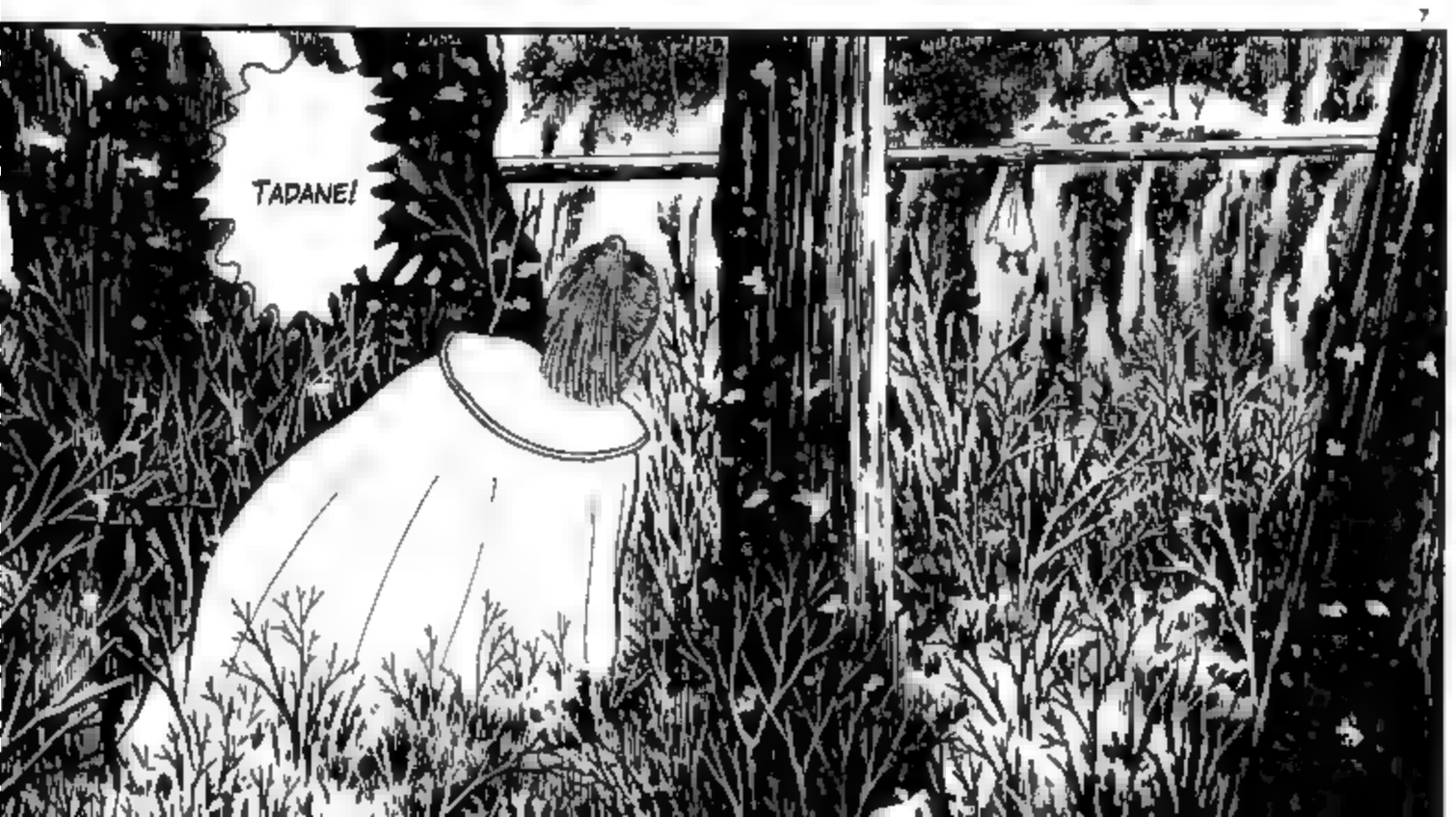
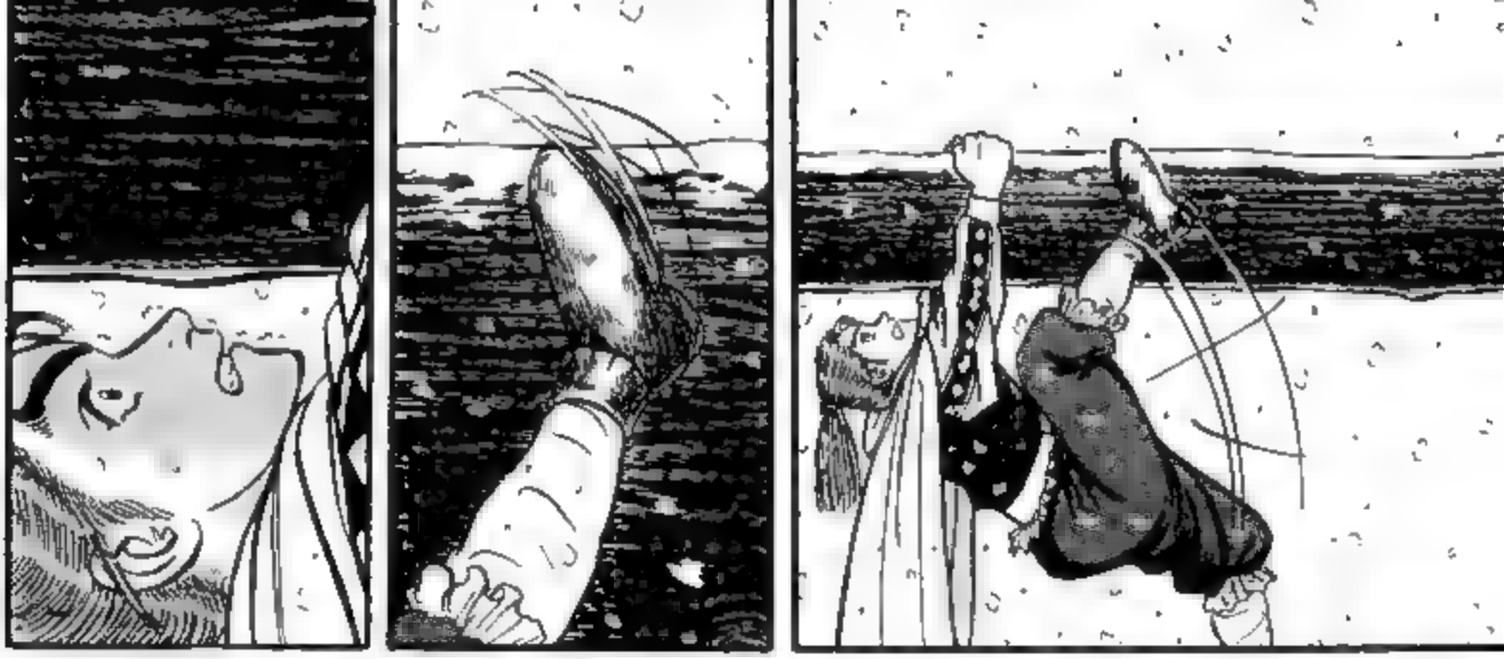
SHIZUNE-SAMA!
SH...SH... SH...
SHIZUNE-SAMA!


TADANE!



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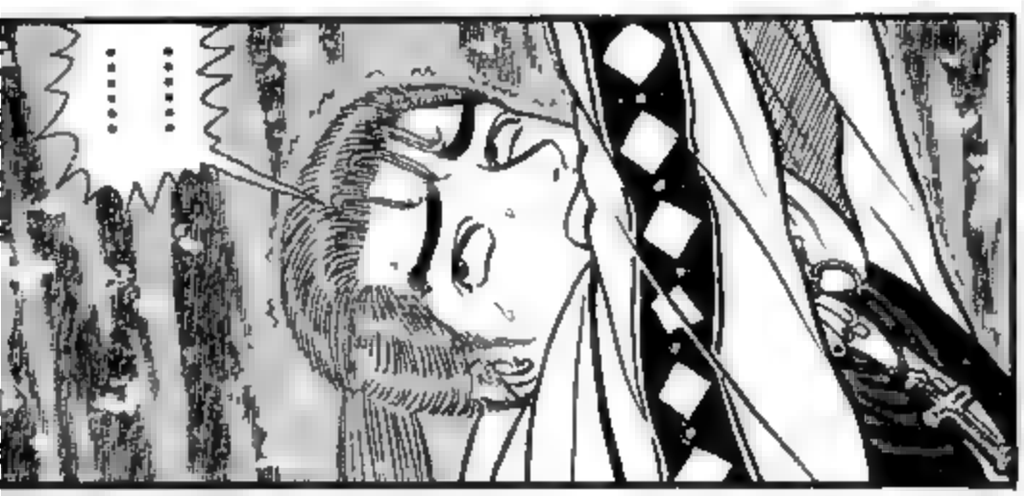
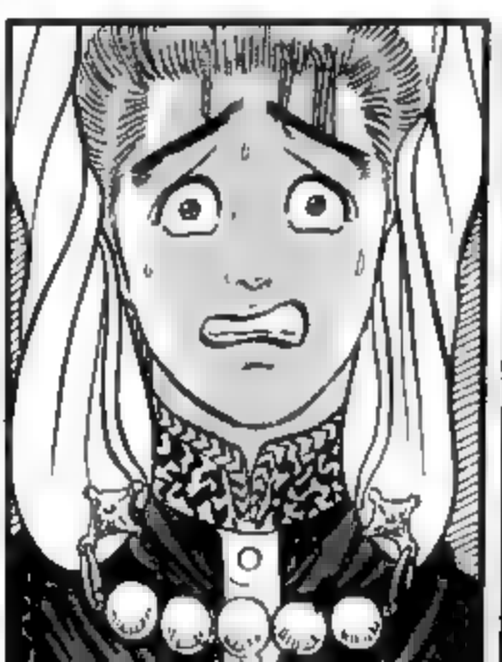
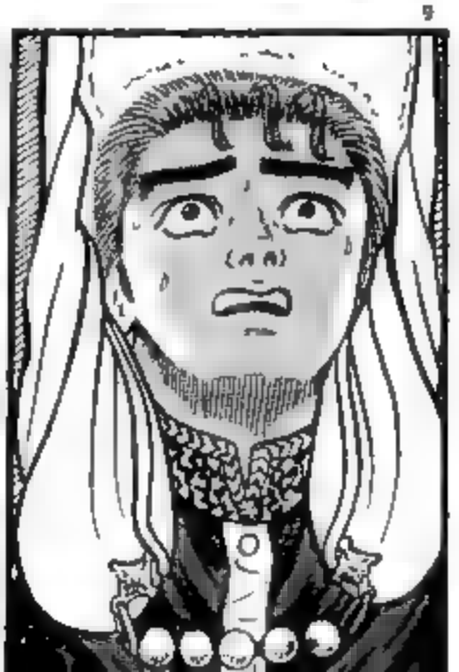
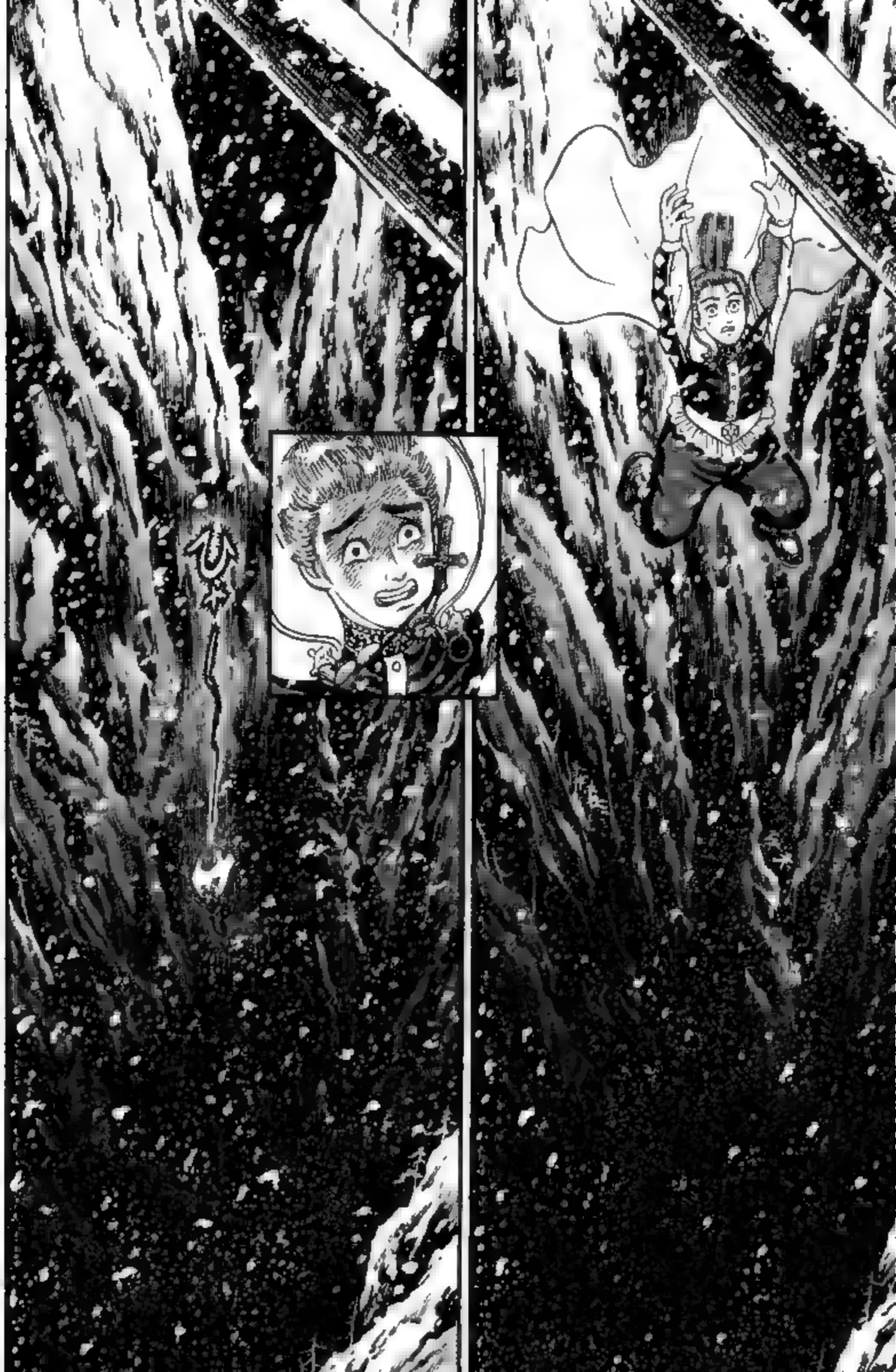
SHIZUNE-SAMA..





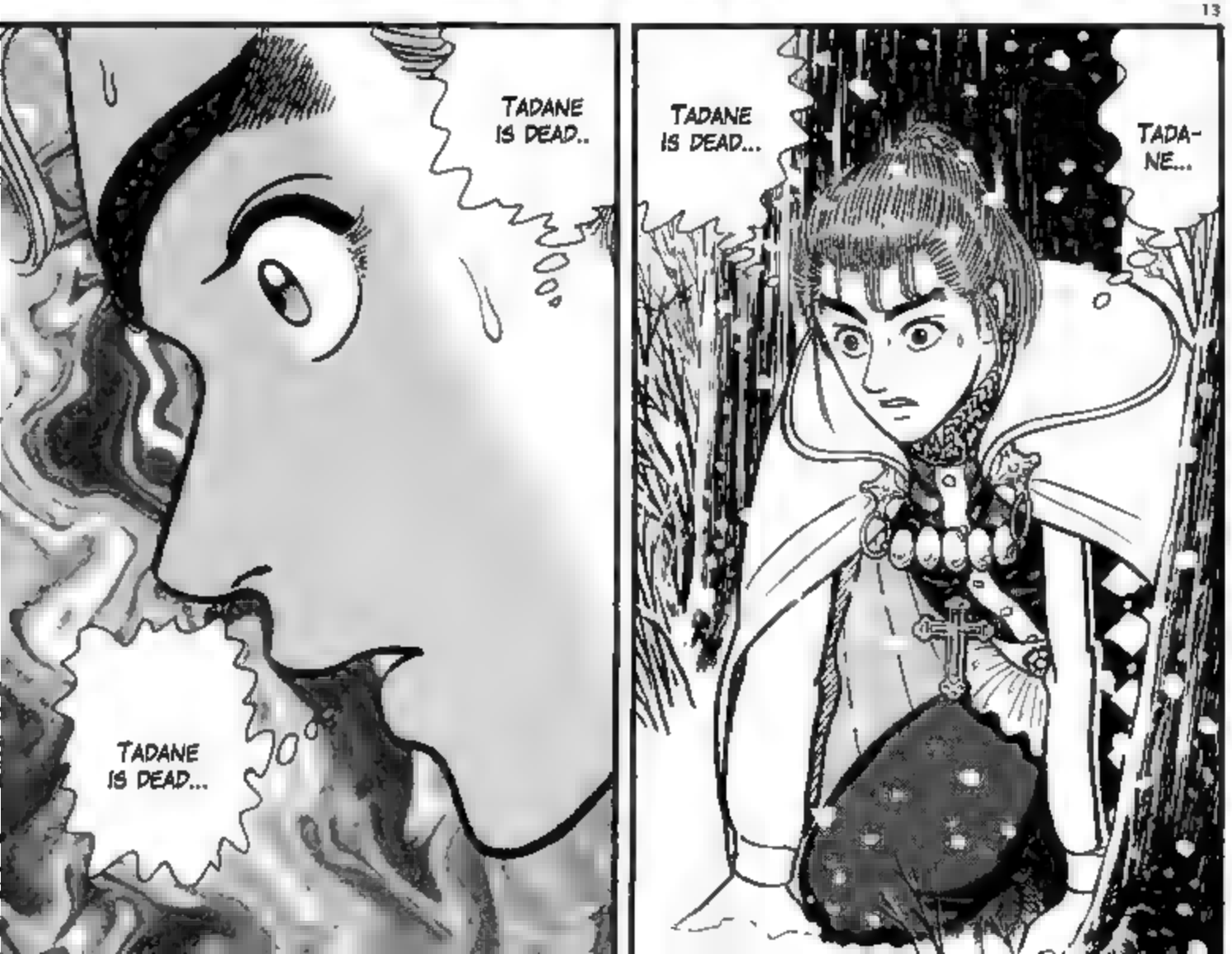




HYAAAAAH!
AAAH!

AAAAH!
SHIZUNE-SAMA...IS...

NOW FOR THE OTHER ONE.
NOO!
SHIZUNE-SAMA'S..


TADANE IS DEAD..
TADANE IS DEAD...
TADANE IS DEAD...
TADA-NE...

SHUNJIRŌ-DONO! WE HAVE WON A GREAT VICTORY IN THE HOLY WAR!
SHUNJIRŌ-DONO, YOU HAVE A HIGH FEVER! YOU SHOULD REST!
ドタドタドタ

OOOH! I FEEL NO PAIN NOW!
THE PAIN IN MY BELLY WHERE I WAS SHOT BY SHIZUNE HAS FADED...

THIS MEDICINE WORKS SO WELL!
AMA-ZING!

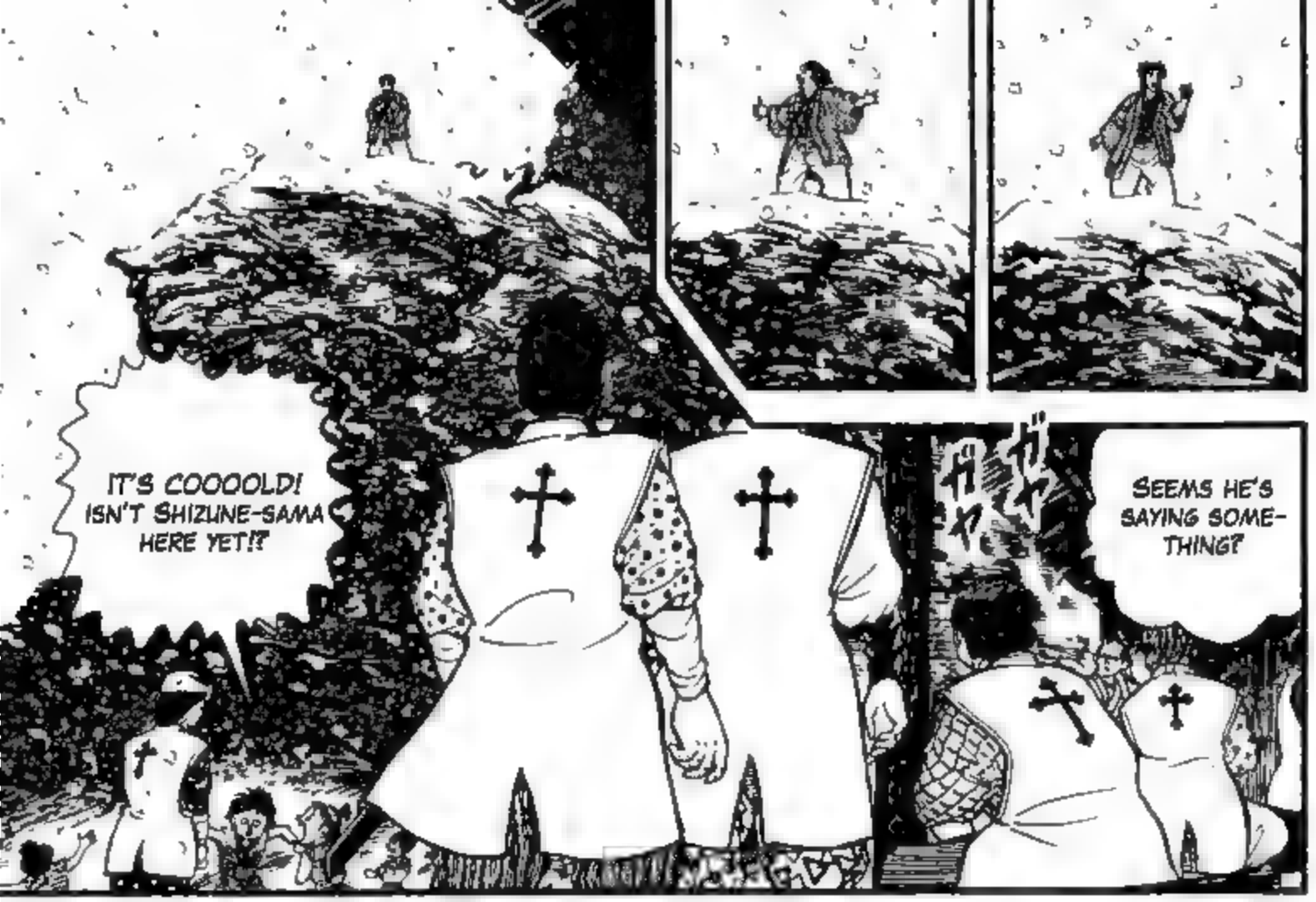
WHAT'S THIS...?
IT'S SHINING!

AHH!
!!
.....

SHUNJIRŌ-SAMA! WHERE ARE YOU...!?

I HAVE FOUND IIIIT!
MY GOOD-NESS!
THAT IS IIIIIT!
THAT'S IT!!!!
I SEE!

NOW, I FOUND...THE NEW SHAPE OF THE IDEAL COUNTRY THAT HAUNTED MY THOUGHTS SO MUCH!
AAAAH!
THAT'S RIGHT!!! THIS IS !!!!!IT!
I MUST TELL EVERY-ONE ABOUT
THIS IDEAL COUNTRY I HAVE ENVISI-ONED!
ガヤガヤ
ガヤガヤ
ガヤガヤ
ガヤガヤ
OH...ISN'T THAT SHUNJIRŌ-SAMA?
THAT'S RIGHT!
BUT WHAT'S HE DOING IN SUCH A PLACE?

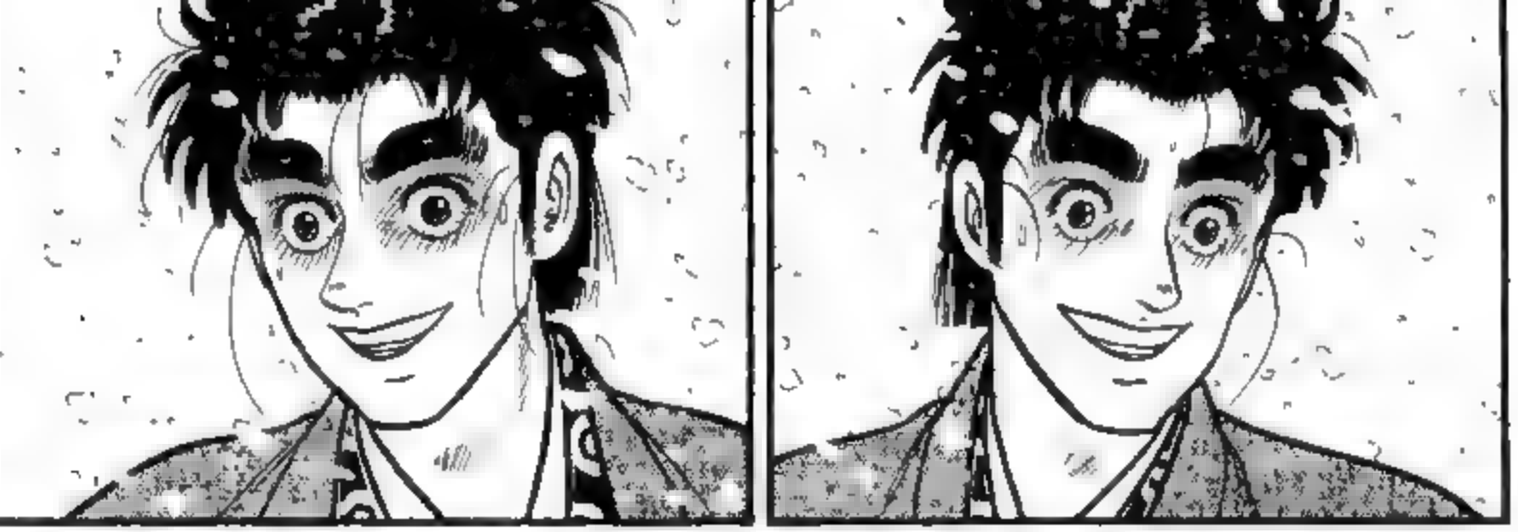

IT'S COOOOLD! ISN'T SHIZUNE-SAMA HERE YET!?
SEEMS HE'S SAYING SOMETHING?

I SPOKE OF THIS MANY A TIME!
EVERYONE WILL GROW RICHER AND RICHER!
SO WITHOUT PAYING THE ANNUAL TRIBUTE,
A CLASS LIKE THE CASTLE SAMURAI THAT DO NO MANUAL LABOR AT ALL BUT HOLD THE POWER MUST VANISH IN THE NEW COUNTRY!

ALL THE ADULTS SHALL WORK TO SUCCESS!
ALL THE CHILDREN SHALL STUDY!

WILL BE CARED FOR AND LEAD A PEACEFUL LIFE!
ALL THE ELDERLY AND SICK

IT WON'T BE THE LIKE OF GENSAI AND HIS MEN OF COURSE!
IN A SOCIETY WITHOUT ANY SAMURAI!?
WHO WILL BE THE ONE TO GOVERN!?



PEOPLE CHOSEN FROM AMONG EVERY-ONE!
THE PEOPLE WILL!
WHO!?

AND DECISIONS WILL BE THROUGH A VOTE!
THEY'LL BE PEOPLE WHO THE PEOPLE WANT!! EVERYONE WILL CHOOSE SOME-ONE HE WANTS TO TRUST,
DO YOU UNDER-STAND!?

IT'S TRUE!! SHIZUNE-SAMA...WAS HIT BY A SHURIKEN THROWN BY A YOUNG GIRL HE SAID TO BE A SHOGUNATE ASSASSIN AND HE ENDED UP FALLING DOWN INTO THAT VALLEY...
WHAT DID YOU SAY!?
SHZIUNE-SAMA FELL INTO THE VALLEY!?
WHAT !?

ISN'T IT A WOND-ERFUL IDEA!?
SO!?
WILL CONSULT TOGETHER AND DECIDE POLICY AS ONE!
AND THE PEOPLE CHOSEN THIS WAY
WH-WHAA AAAAAT!?
WHAAA AAAT!?
SHIZUNE-SAMA HAS FALLEN DOWN INTO THE VALLEY!
HAVE YOU HEARD !?

WILL END UP HOLDING THE POWER!
THESE CHOSEN FEW!
BUT!

AND ALL WILL HAVE BEEN FOR NAUGHT !!!
WILL ONE DAY BECOME JUST LIKE THE CASTLE SAMURAI!
THESE PEOPLE
NOOOO!
SH-SH-SHIZUNE-SAMA...

AAAAH! NOOOO!
AS IF SHIZUNE-SAMA COULD DIE!!...HE'S THE SON OF GOD!!
NO WAY! THAT'S RIDI-CULOUS !!!
HAS SHIZUNE-SAMA PASSED AWAY!?

WE'LL SET UP A TERM OF OFFICE FOR THEM!
AND SO!

WE'LL HAVE ANOTHER VOTE ONCE AGAIN!
WHEN THEIR TERM IS UP
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SHOGUN-ATE ASSASSIN!?
SHIZUNE-SAMAAAA!

IT MEANS THAT THOSE WHO INDULGED IN POWER AND THOSE WHO
PURSUED THEIR OWN SELF-INTEREST WON'T BE ABLE TO BE CHOSEN AGAIN!!
IN OTHER WORDS, IT'S SET UP SO THAT
ONLY THOSE WHO GOVERNED WELL
AND GAINED POPULARITY CAN ALWAYS HAVE A PLACE!

SO!?
AMAZING, RIGHT!?

なんとすばらしい!!!!
俊次郎様ーっ!!!
HOW WONDERFUL, SHUNJIRŌ-SAMA!!
THIS IS THE SHAPE OT THE COMPLETELY NEW IDEAL COUNTRY I'VE THOUGHT!!
WHAT DO YOU ALL THINK!?

THE ASSASSIN WHO THREW SHIZUNE-SAMA DOWN THE VALLEY!
THAT YOUNG GIRL!
AAA AAH!
WHAT!?
HASN'T THE OTHER SHIZUNE
COME TO THE GOLD MINE YET...?

DAMN YOU! DEMOOON!
AN EVIL YASHA!
DEMON! DEVIL! THIS GIRL IS A DEMOOOOOON!

KILL HEEEER!
KILL HEEER!! IT'S THE YASHA GIRL WHO MADE SHIZUNE-SAMA, THE "SON OF GOD", FALL DOWN INTO THE VALLEEEEEEEY!!
KILL THE DEMOOOON!
WHERE IS HE HIDING?
THE OTHER SHIZUNE....
SEEMS HE'S NOT HERE YET...

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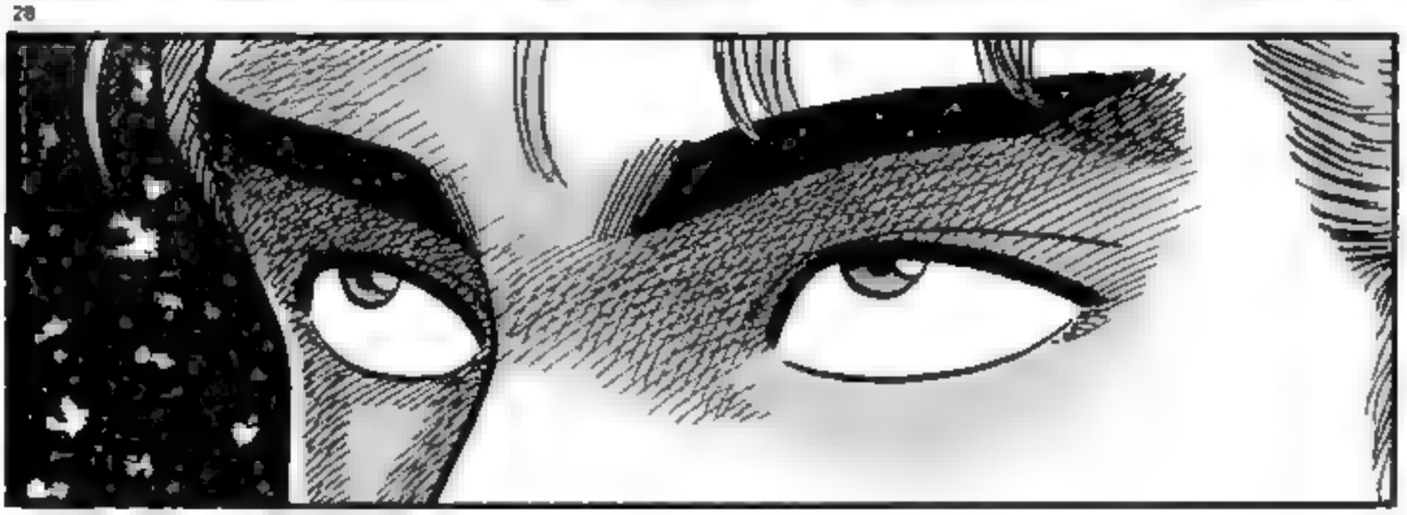
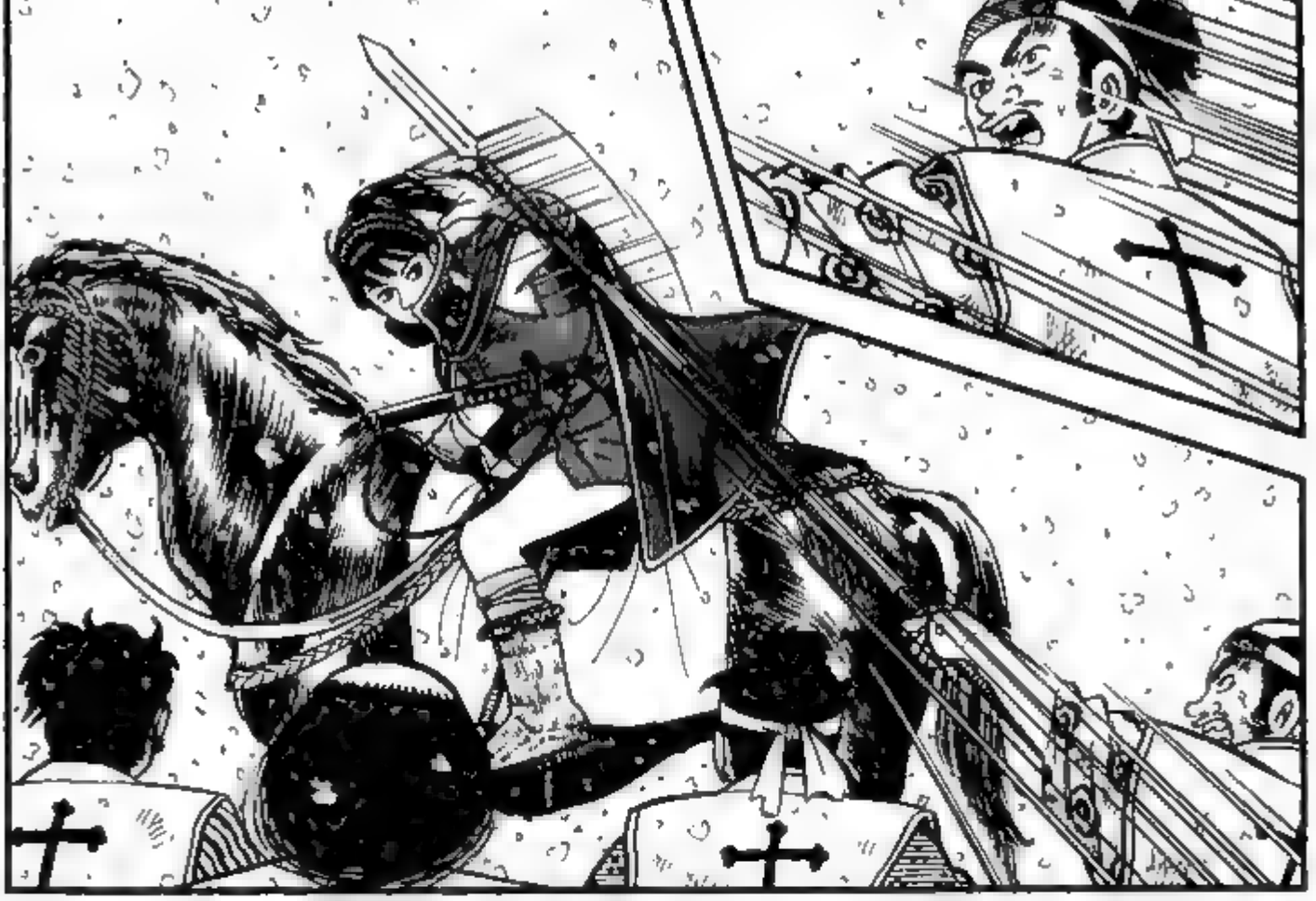


CHAPTER 4
THEIR HEARTS



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IF I'D HIDDEN MYSELF...WOULD HE HAVE COME OUT?
WHERE IS THE OTHER SHIZUNE!? IS HE HIDING BECAUSE HE'S AFRAID OF ME?
ドガガガガ

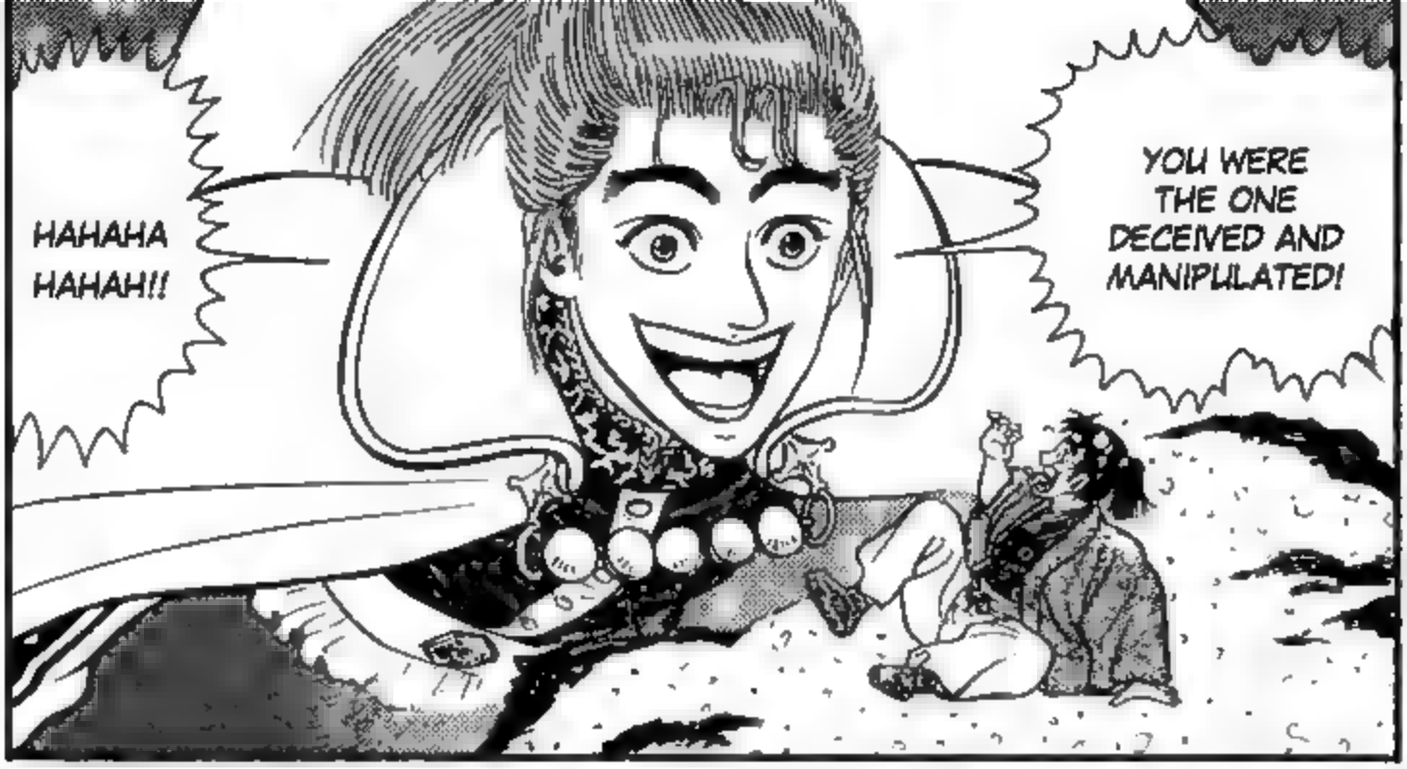
HE'LL GO TO THE GOLD MINE FOR SURE!
TO HAVE EVERYONE GATHER AT THE MINE...
I CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE SHIZUNE WOULD GIVE UP HIS EVIL SCHEME
ドガガガ

AZUMI-NEE-CHAN IS HEE-EERE!
AAAH! BIIIIG BROO!

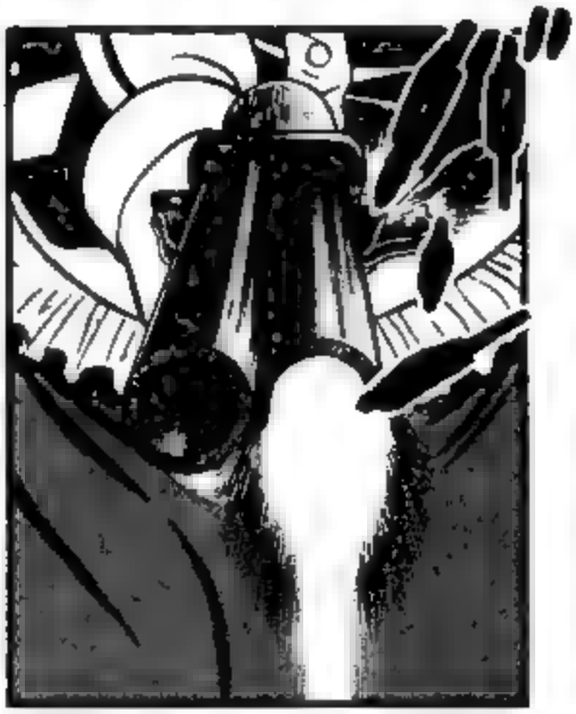
AH?
WH... WHAT?
WHAT'S HAPP-ENING !?

WH-WHERE
HAS... EVERYONE GONE!?

I...I... I...!?
AHAHAH HAHAHAHA HAHAHA!
SUCH A NAIVE LITTLE FOOL, SHUNJIRO!


HAHAHA
HAHAH!!
YOU WERE THE ONE DECEIVED AND MANIPULATED!

HAAA OOOO OOOH!



AHHHH! IT HURTS! IT HUUU UURTS!

.....

AAAAH! AZUMI-SAN!
SHUNJIRO, ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
I... I...
PLEASE. GET A HOLD OF YOUR-SELF.
AAAAH, AZUMI-SAAAN...

SHUN-
JIRO-
DONO
!!!
STOP
!!!!!T!
STOOO
OOOP!

!?
.....

ELDER
BRO-
THER
!!!
FATHER!
MOTH-
ER!
WAH!

PLEASE! FORGIVE MEEEE!
AAAA AAAA AAAA AAAH !!!!

THANKS TO POWERFUL PEOPLE LIKE THEM!
SO AN INJUSTICE LIKE THIS NEVER HAPPENS AGAIN!
THIS IS WHY I'VE WORKED MYSELF TO THE BONE!

LISTNE TO THIS IDEAL COUNTRY I'VE CREATED!
PLEASE! LISTEN!

IT'S ALL TO REALIZE AN IDEAL COUNTRY!

SO UNFA-IRNESS
NEVER-

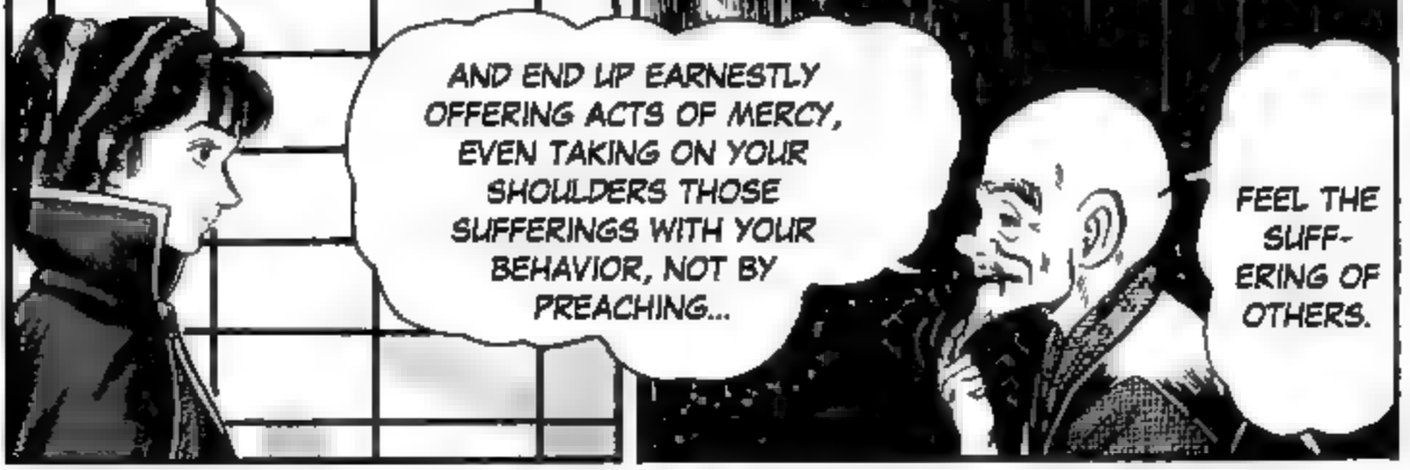
TO PREACH IN FRONT OF SO MANY.
GAINING RESPECT.
AND BEING WORSHI-PED...
THAT'S QUITE
FISHY ...

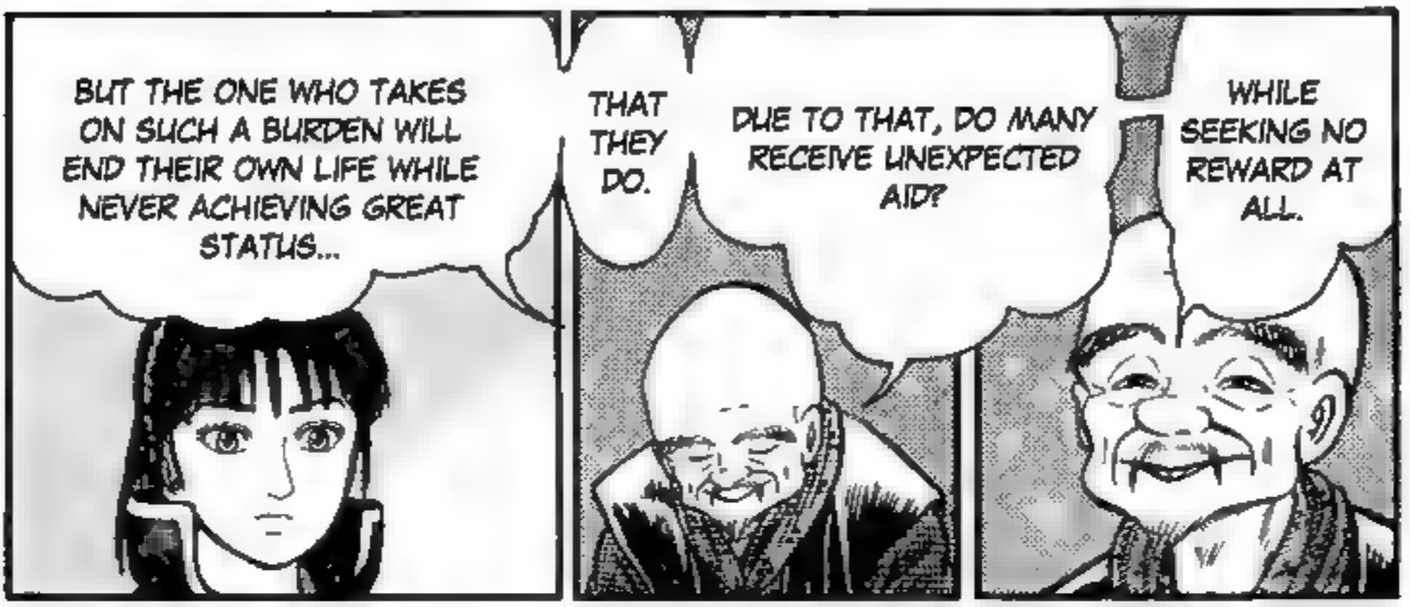
.....

WHEN IT ISN'T LIKE THAT...

SINCE... SWAYING THE HEARTS OF MEN WITH HIS PREACHING
IS A SURE SIGN HE HARBORS SECRET AMBIT-IONS.

YOU, FOR INSTANCE ...
WITH NO CONSIDER-ATION OF YOUR OWN SELF INT-EREST,

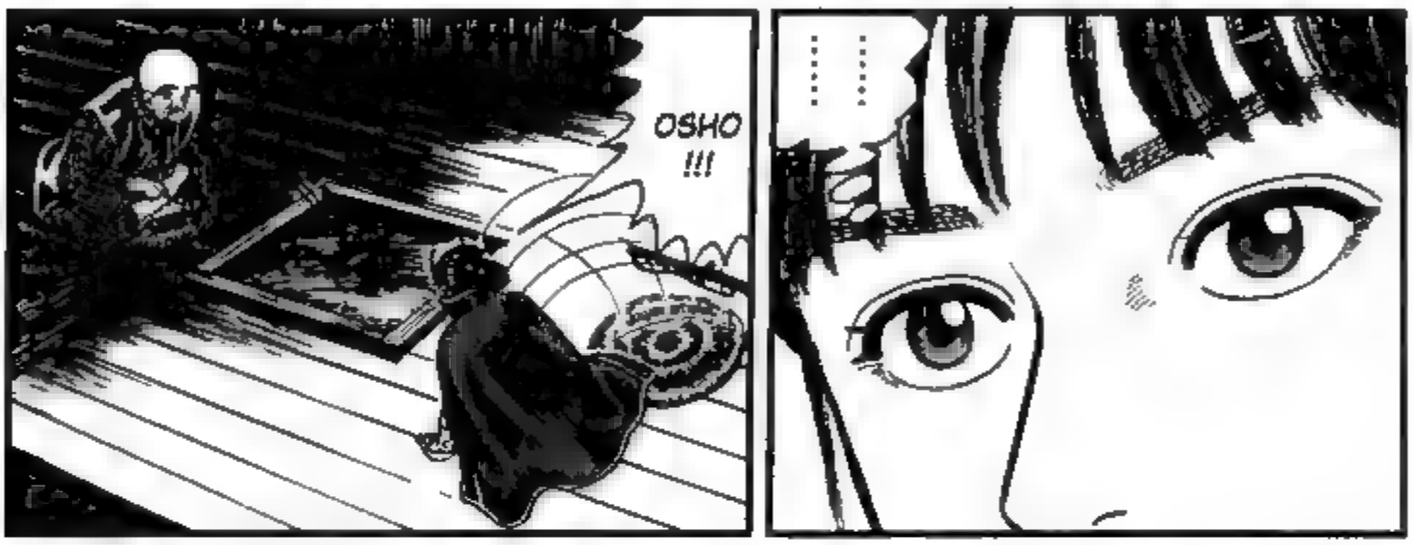

AND END UP EARNESTLY OFFERING ACTS OF MERCY, EVEN TAKING ON YOUR SHOULDERS THOSE SUFFERINGS WITH YOUR BEHAVIOR, NOT BY PREACHING...
FEEL THE SUFF-ERING OF OTHERS.


BUT THE ONE WHO TAKES ON SUCH A BURDEN WILL END THEIR OWN LIFE WHILE NEVER ACHIEVING GREAT STATUS...
THAT THEY DO.
DUE TO THAT, DO MANY RECEIVE UNEXPECTED AID?
WHILE SEEKING NO REWARD AT ALL.

THEN THAT'S JUST FINE.
IF THEY GRADUALLY BECOME A BEING THAT IS WORSHIPED
AND MAY EVEN WONDER IF THEY WERE NOT A GOD!
TALK OF THIS ONE'S GREAT-NESS!
AND SO, THOSE LEFT IN THIS WORLD

FOR NEVER ATTENDING SHIZUNE'S PREACHING?
OSHO, DIDN'T YOU RECEIVE A GREAT DEAL OF CRITICISM
.....

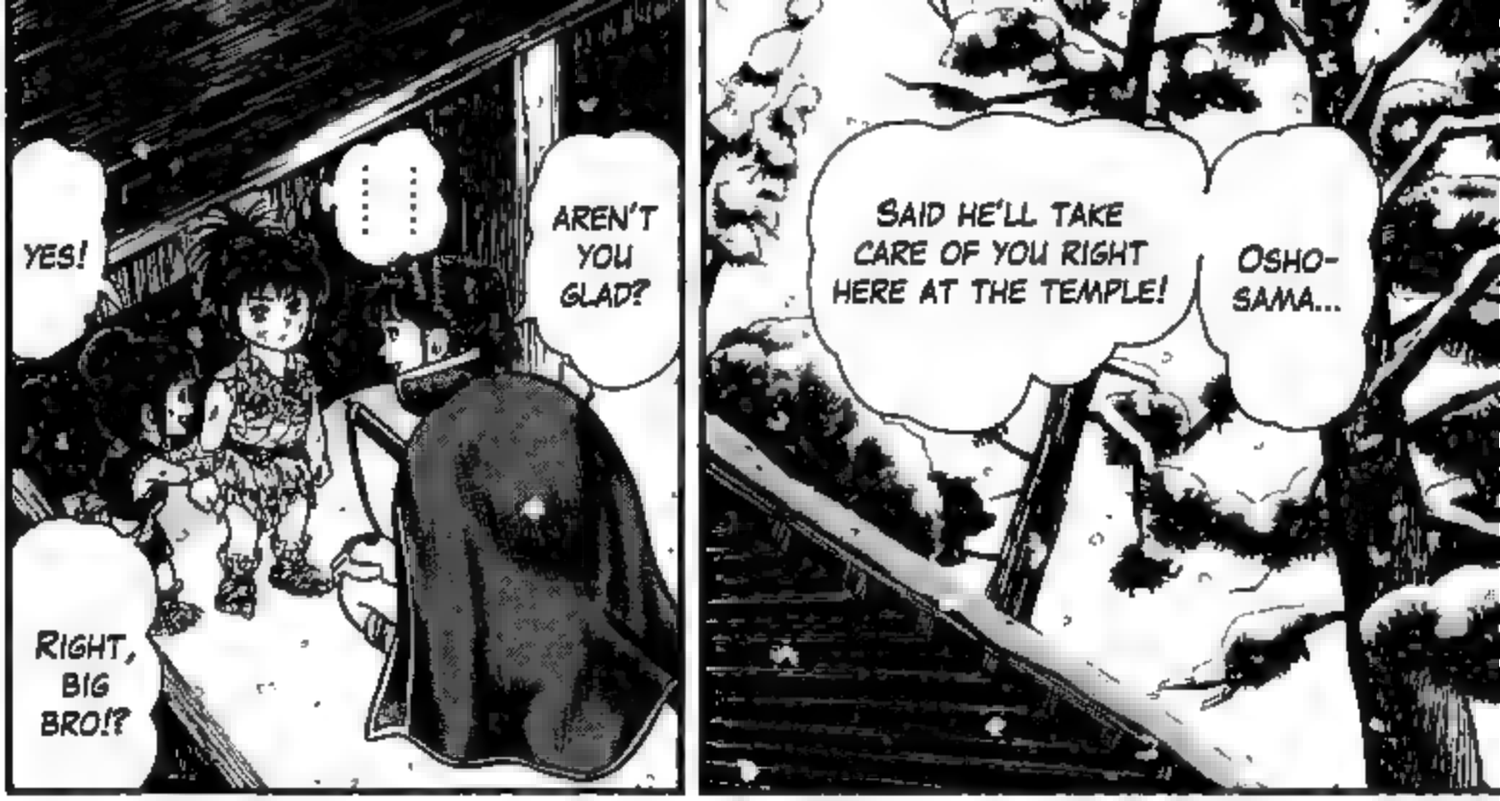
AND AS A SERVANT OF THE BUDDHA, I COULD NEVER BECOME A CHRISTIAN! HAHAHA!
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN SEEN AS QUITE THE ECCE-NTRIC OLD MAN!


OSHO !!!
.....

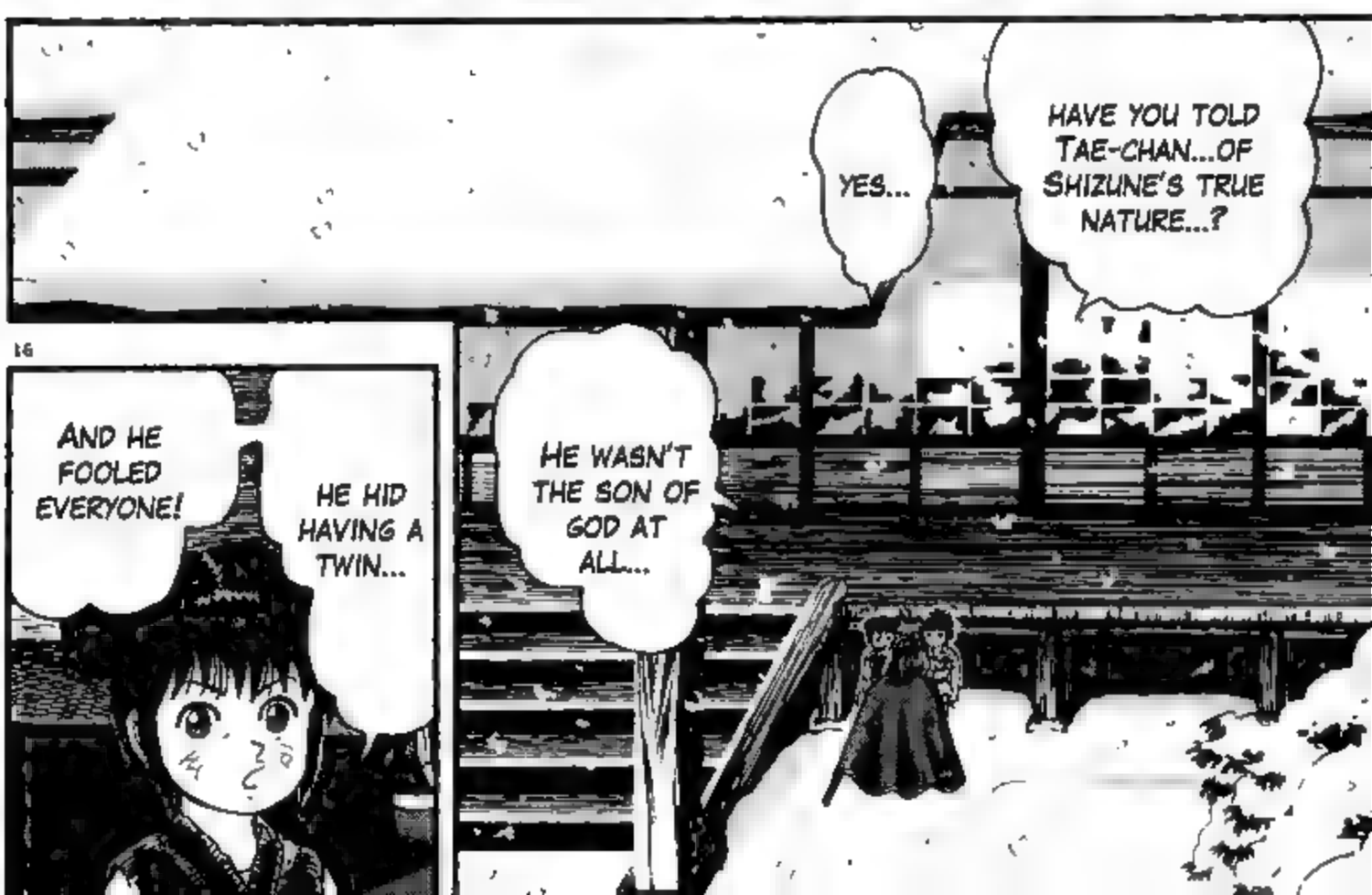
OH, I'VE ALREADY DECIDED TO DO JUST THAT!
PLEASE TAKE THEM IN!!!
IT SEEMS THEY HAVE AN AUNT WITH WHO'S ESTRANGED FROM THEM, BUT THEY SAY THAT SINCE SHE'S ILL-NATURED THEY WOULD LIKE TO AVOID GOING TO HER...
ABOUT GACCHI AND TAE-CHAN... WHO HAVE LOST THEIR FATHER!

SOMEHOW, WE'VE NEVER BEEN BLESSED WITH CHILDREN HERE...
.....
AH ...?

BUT SOME-HOW...
WHEN WE WERE YOUNG, WE TRIED QUITE ZEALOUSLY, Y'KNOW!
.....
TO BE GIFTED WITH A PAIR OF GRANDCHILDREN SO SHARP AND KIND!
THE MISSUS WILL BE QUITE PLEASED!
THANK YOU OH SO MUCH!
THANK YOU!!!
15
ARE YOU DONE TALKING TO OSHO-SAN!?
AHHH! AZUMI-NEECHAN!


YES!
AREN'T YOU GLAD?
RIGHT, BIG BRO!?
SAID HE'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU RIGHT HERE AT THE TEMPLE!
OSHO-SAMA...

YES! WE WILL!
DON'T JUST PLAY, THOUGH! YOU NEED TO HELP OUT HERE, TOO!

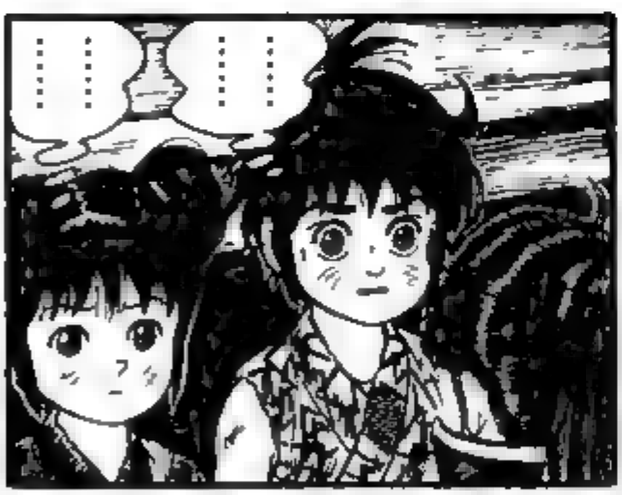

YES...
HAVE YOU TOLD TAE-CHAN...OF SHIZUNE'S TRUE NATURE...?
HE WASN'T THE SON OF GOD AT ALL...
HE HID HAVING A TWIN...
AND HE FOOLED EVERYONE!

I'M GOING TO GO KILL THE OTHER ONE AS WELL...
REALLY !?
AHH!?
ONE SHIZUNE DIED BY FALLING INTO THE VALLEY.
.....
.....
YOU MEAN YOU'RE GOING AWAY!?
SO THIS IS FARE-WELL.
WHEN THAT'S DONE, THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO DO IN THIS LAND FOR ME.

.....
WILL YOU COME TO VISIT US AGAIN ONE DAY!?
.....
YES.

I MAY ...
NOT BE COMING BACK HERE...

SO...THIS IS IT...?



THERE'S NO WAY I COULD EVER FORGET THE TWO OF YOU!
GACCHI. YOU SAVED MY LIFE!

LISTEN VERY CLOSE TO WHAT I HAVE TO TELL YOU TWO RIGHT NOW...
MOST IMPOR-TANTLY,

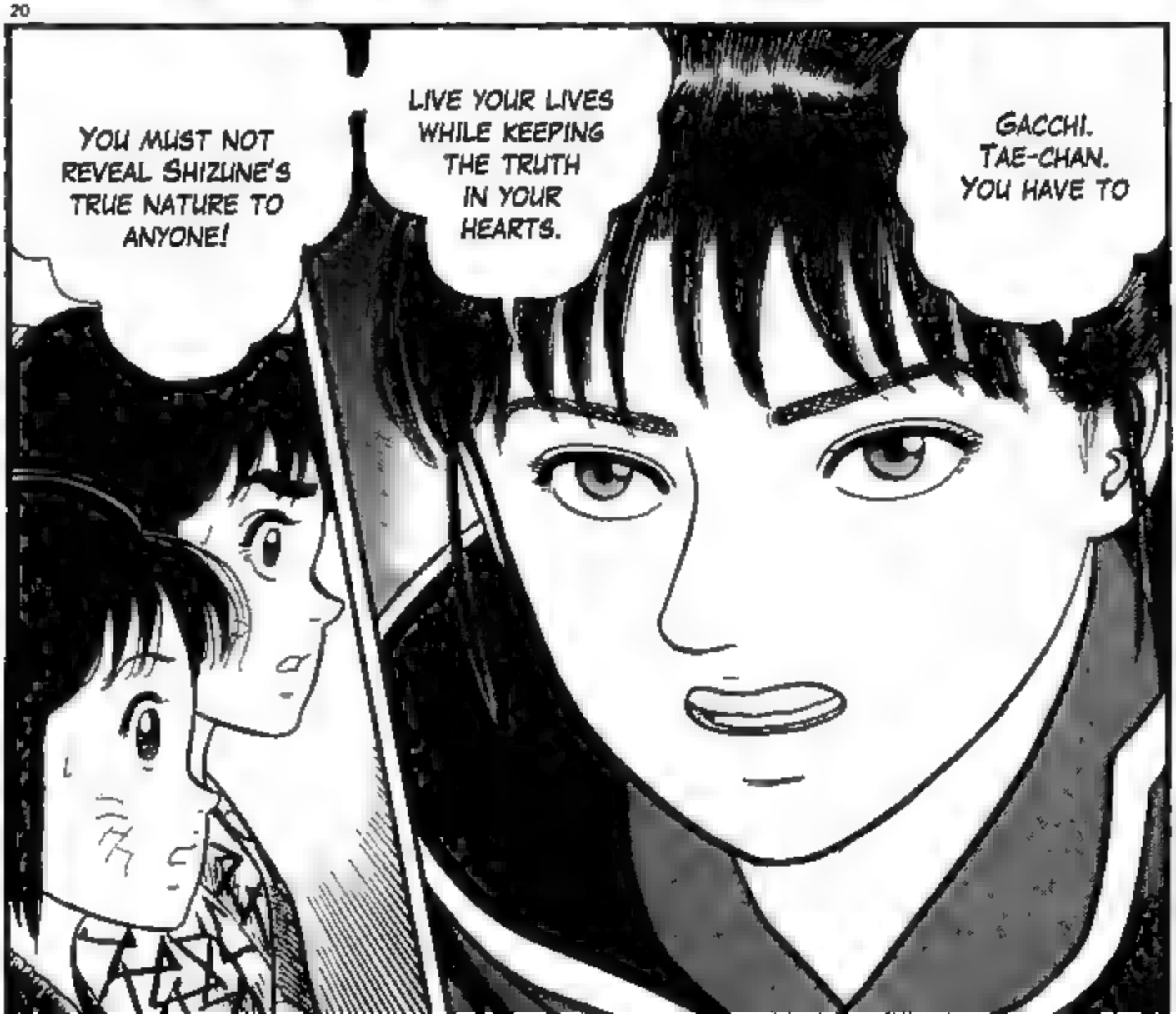
I DON'T CARE OF HOW THEY SPEAK OF ME.
AFTER I'M GONE FROM THIS LAND,
WILL BE DESPISED AND LOATHED, CALLED A DEMON AND A SHE-DEVIL.
I, THE ONE WHO KILLED SHIZUNE, THE ONE BELOVED THROUGHOUT THIS LAND AS THE SON OF GOD,

AND TELL THEM SHIZUNE HAD A TWIN, AND HOW EVIL HE TRULY WAS...
COVER FOR ME
BUT IF YOU TWO, GACCHI, TAE-CHAN, WHO LIVE IN THIS LAND,

YOU'D NEVER BE ABLE TO LIVE HERE ANYMORE!
WICKED CHILDREN AND DIRECT THEIR ANGER TOWARDS YOU! I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'LL DO!
THEY'LL CALL YOU

.....
.....
YOU GET IT, RI-GHT?

SO...
EVEN WITH SHIZUNE DEAD, HE'LL BE WORSHIPED AS THE SON OF GOD IN THIS LAND FOR ALL ETERNITY...


YOU MUST NOT REVEAL SHIZUNE'S TRUE NATURE TO ANYONE!
LIVE YOUR LIVES WHILE KEEPING THE TRUTH IN YOUR HEARTS.
GACCHI. TAE-CHAN. YOU HAVE TO

CAN YOU DO IT!?
AMONG THE PEOPLE, YOU'LL HEAR THAT SHIZUNE-SAMA WAS THE SON OF GOD, AND THAT HE WAS AMAZING... THAT'S WHEN YOU'LL HAVE TO SAY SOMETHING INSINCERE...
FROM TIME TO TIME,

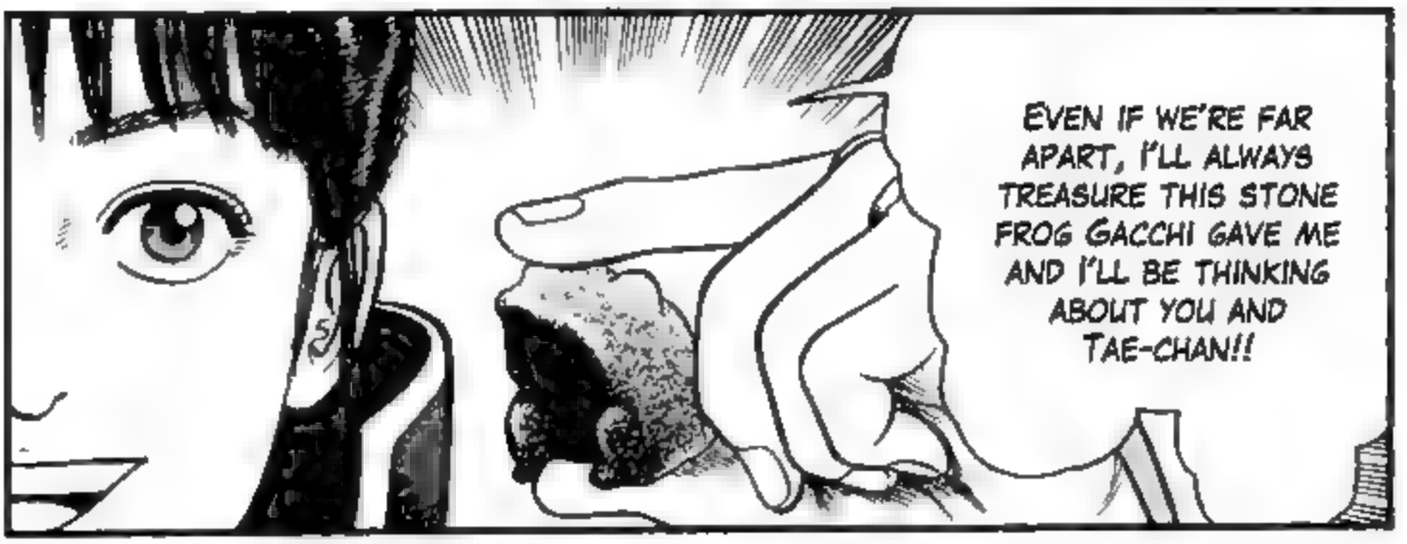
.....
AND YOU, TAE-CHAN?
OKAY!? GACCHI?
WHEN THE TIME COMES, YOU HAVE TO!

.....

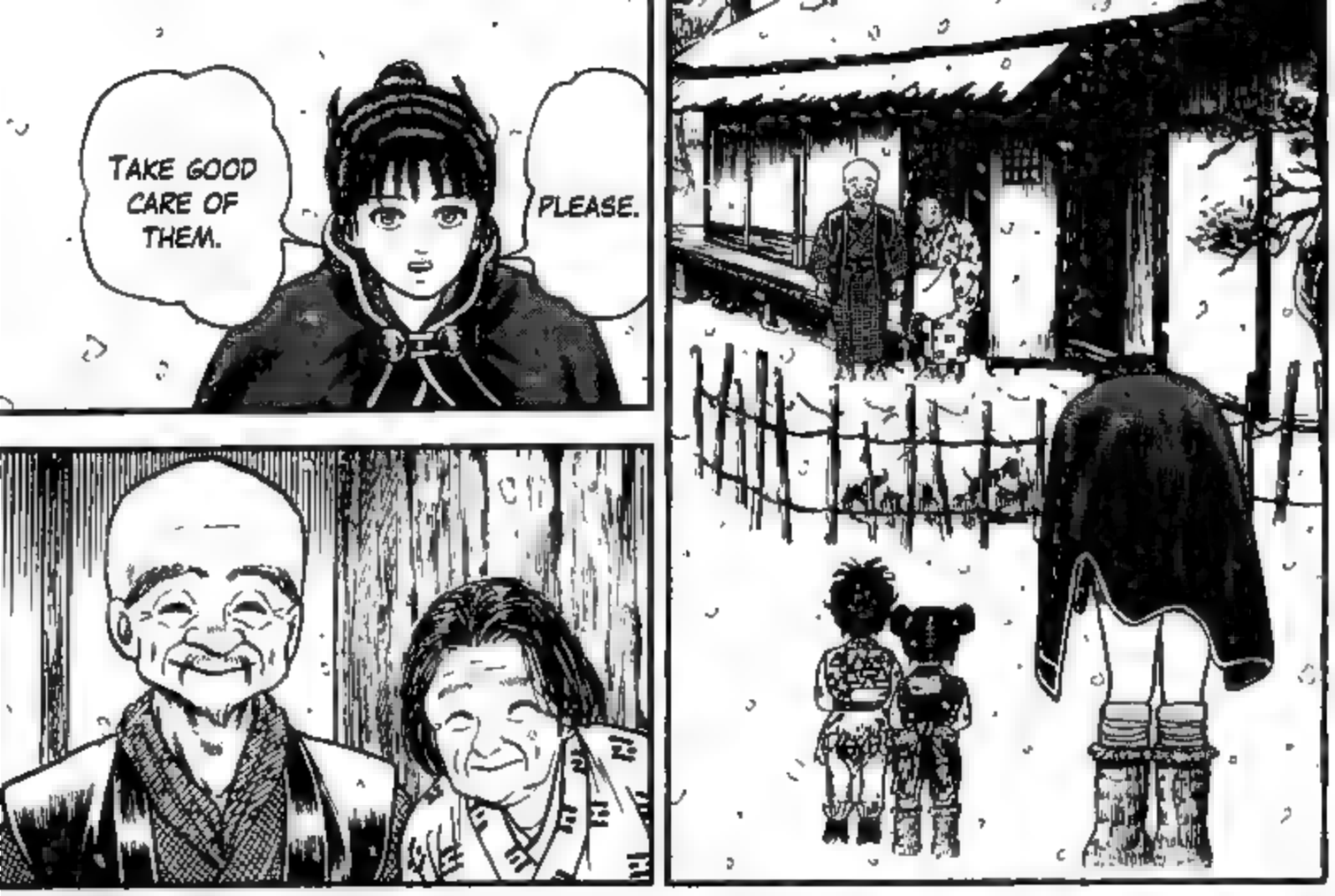
.....

HIDING YOUR TRUE FEELINGS IN YOUR HEARTS!
GO ON LIVING IN THIS SOCIETY
YOU MUST
UNDER-STOOD !?

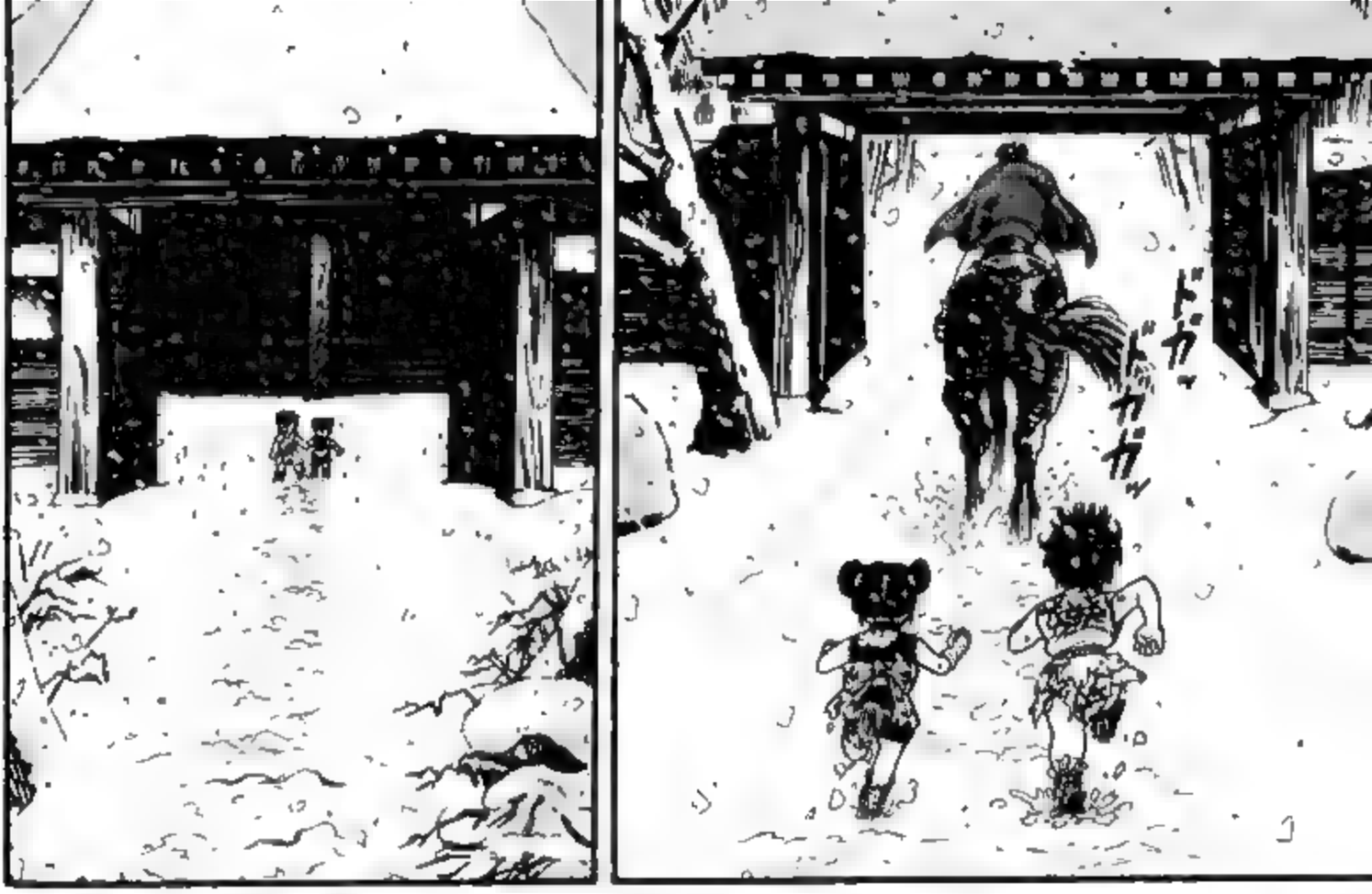
TOPS THAT I MADE!
THESE ARE


EVEN IF WE'RE FAR APART, I'LL ALWAYS TREASURE THIS STONE FROG GACCHI GAVE ME AND I'LL BE THINKING ABOUT YOU AND TAE-CHAN!!

AND YOU WILL REACH ME! I SWEAR IT!
AND EVEN IF I'M FAR AWAY, THINK HOW OUR HEARTS ARE CONNECTED!
LOOK AT THESE TOPS!
YOU TWO... WHENEVER IT BECOMES PAINFUL TO LIVE ON BY LYING


TAKE GOOD CARE OF THEM.
PLEASE.

GOOD-BYE!
TAE-CHAN.
GACCHI.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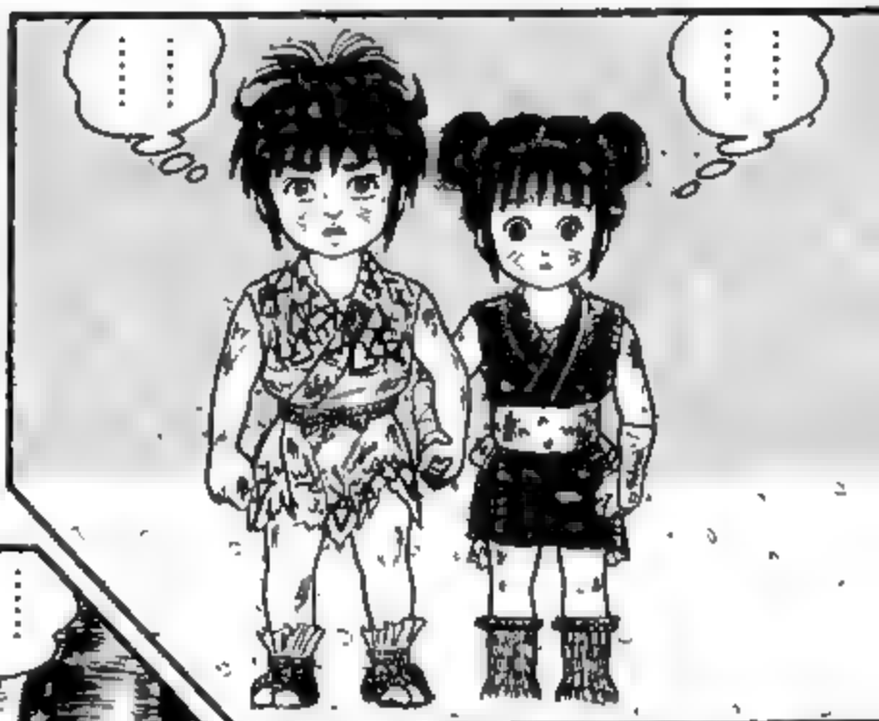
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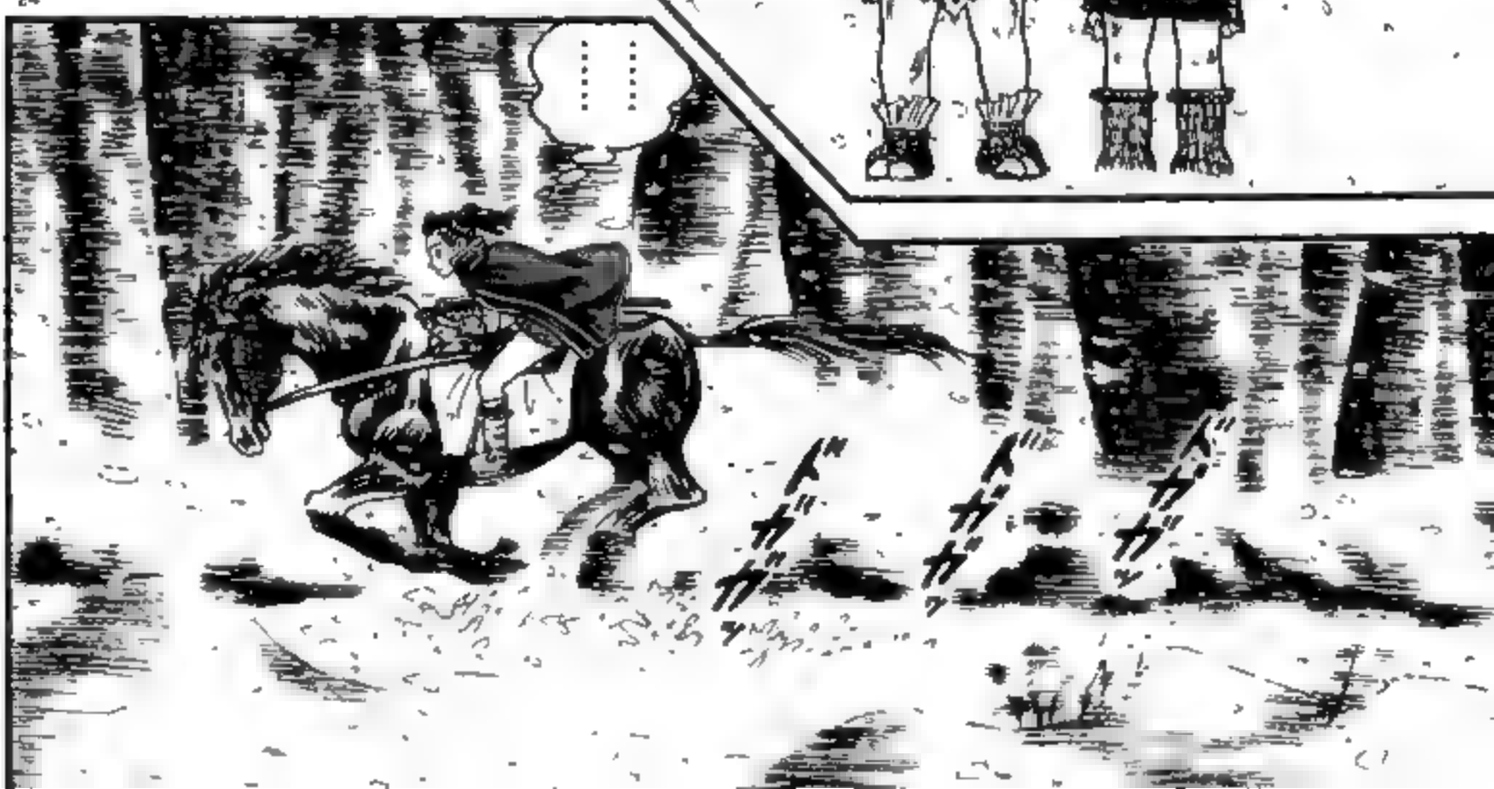
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NOBODY HERE?
WHAT HAPP-ENED?
I SEE...
PER-HAPS
EVERYONE HAS GONE TO WHERE THAT SHIZUNE FELL INTO THE VALLEY...

SHIZUNE-SAMAAA!
SHIZUNE-SAMAAA!
SHI... ZUNE... SAMA...
HE IS NOT DEAD!
THERE'S NO WAY THE SON OF GOD COULD EVER DIE!

THAT'S RIGHT !!!!!
OHHH HHH!
AND GIVE HER THE DEATH SHE DESERVES!
MOST IMPORTANTLY! WE HAVE TO FIND THAT DEVIL GIRL WHO HURLED OUR SHZUNE-SAMA INTO THE ABYSS OF THE VALLEY

BY HAVING EVERYONE GATHER AT THIS GOLD MINE...?
JUST WHAT IS SHIZUNE SCHEMING

THAT'S WHAT HE WAS THINK-ING...
IF...
DON'T TELL ME HIS PLAN WAS TO KILL EVEN MORE PEOPLE? EVEN THE VICTORS AND THE SURVIVORS?
SHIZUNE WAS MOST JOYFUL WHEN ALL THOSE PEOPLE WERE KILLING ONE ANOTHER IN THE BATTLE...

.....
HE'D INVITE EVERYONE TO ENTER THESE TUNNELS AND THEN..
THEN...

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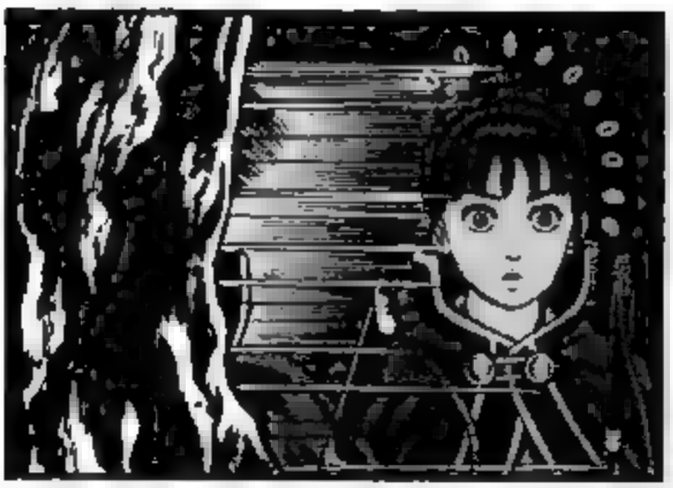
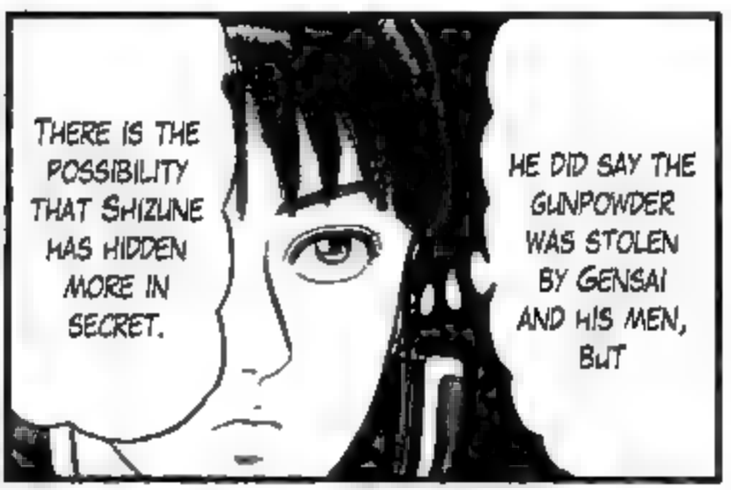
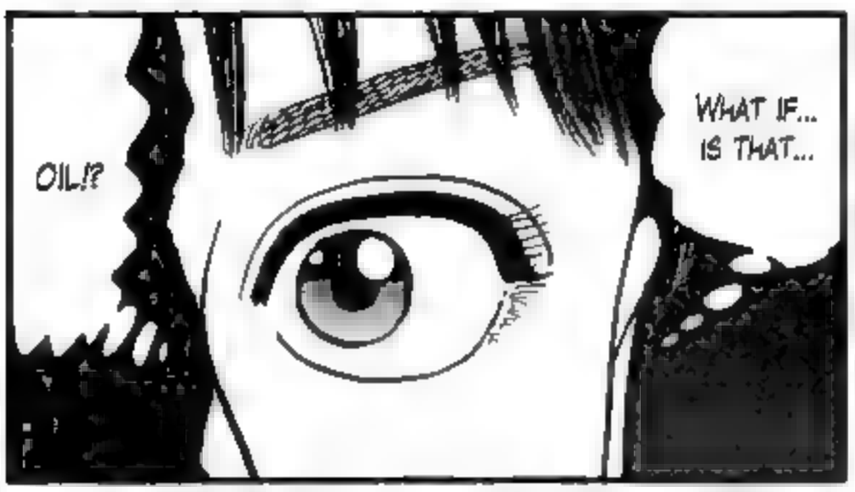
JUST WHAT ARE YOU PLOTTING!?
WHERE ARE YOU NOW?
SHIZUNE...

CHAPTER 5:
MYSTERIOUS
EYES



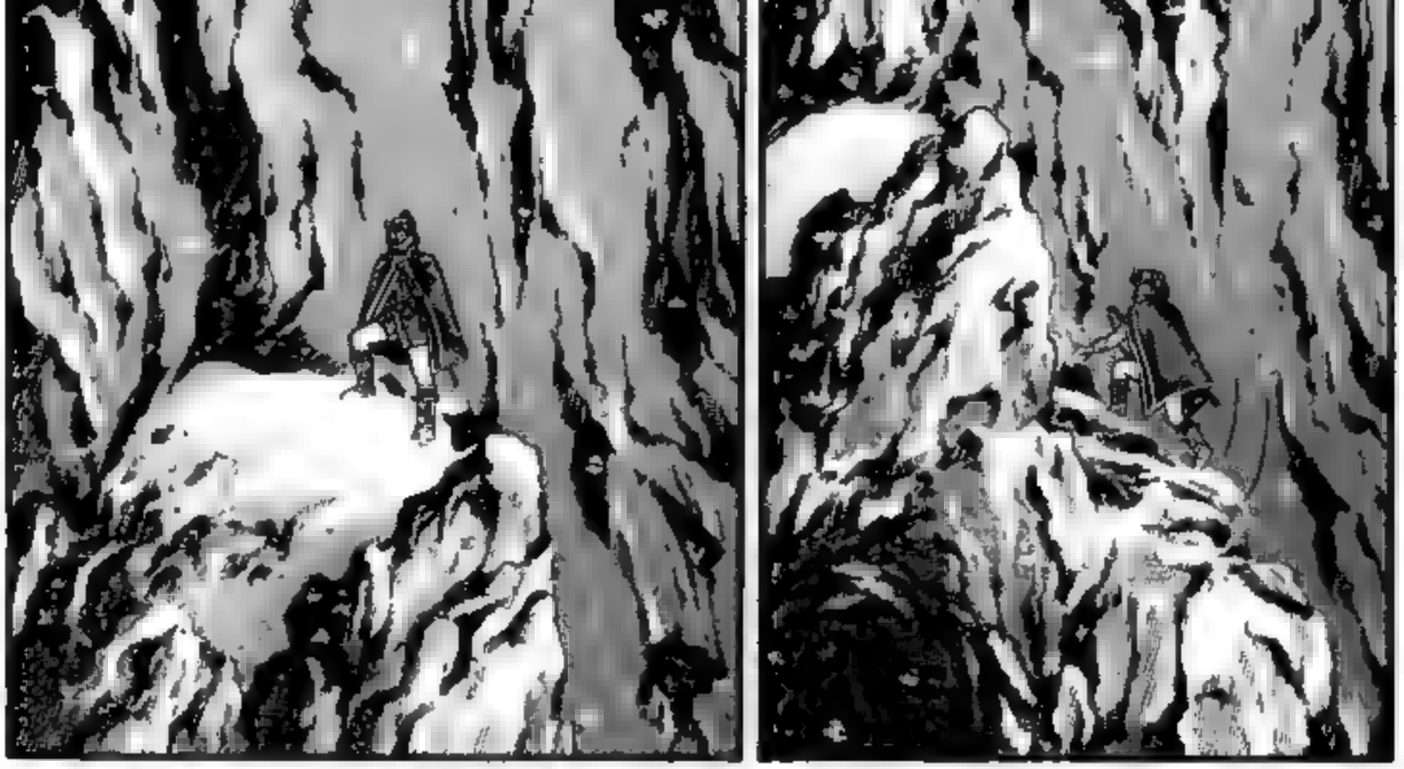

THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT SHIZUNE HAS HIDDEN MORE IN SECRET.
HE DID SAY THE GUNPOWDER WAS STOLEN BY GENSAI AND HIS MEN, BUT

WHAT ARE THEY DOING!?


WHAT IF... IS THAT...
OIL!?

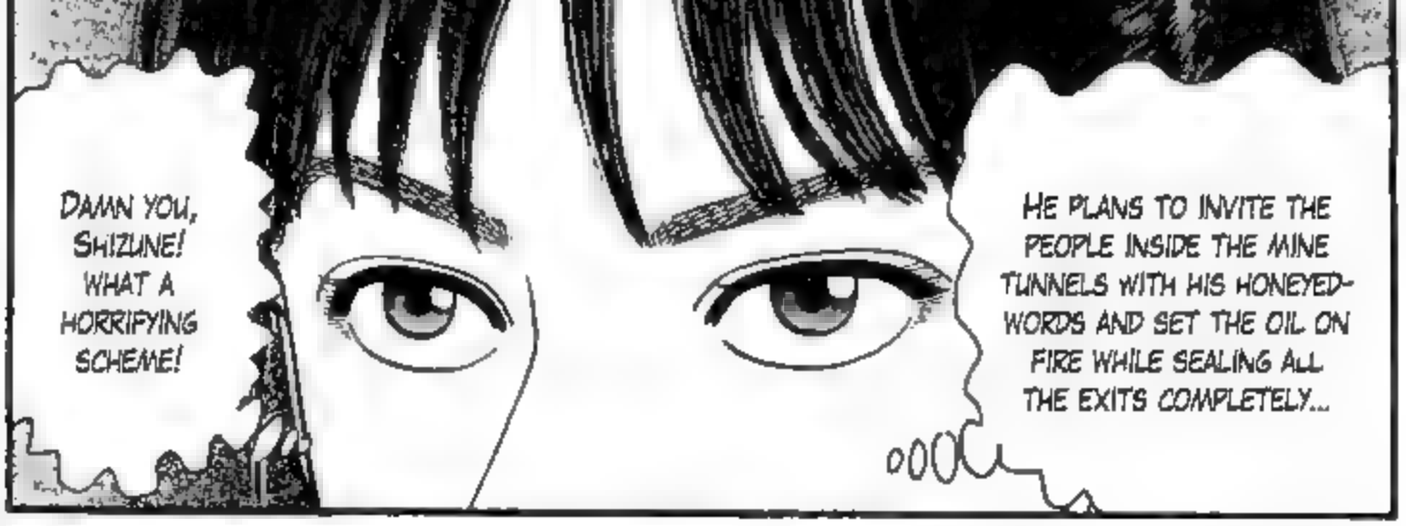
IF HE DID THAT...

DOES HE PLAN TO SET THE OIL ON FIRE!?



AS I THOUGHT.

IF HE WERE TO MAKE THE GUNPOWDER EXPLODE, THE MINE ENTRANCE WOULD BE SEALED SHUT!
HERE IT IS.


DAMN YOU, SHIZUNE! WHAT A HORRIFYING SCHEME!
HE PLANS TO INVITE THE PEOPLE INSIDE THE MINE TUNNELS WITH HIS HONEYED-WORDS AND SET THE OIL ON FIRE WHILE SEALING ALL THE EXITS COMPLETELY...

WHY...!? SHIZUNE, WHY DO YOU WANT TO KILL SO MANY INNOCENT PEOPLE TO THIS EXTENT!?
MOREOVER, THOSE PEOPLE POURING THAT OIL... DO THEY KNOW WHAT IT'S FOR OR NOT...!? IN ANY CASE, THEY'RE PROBABLY DOING THAT BECAUSE SHIZUNE DECEIVED THEM...

I'LL ASK TENKAI-SAMA TO PROTECT HIM...
I CAN'T BE OF ANY MORE HELP TO HIM.

I WONDER IF TENZAN-DONO IS IMPROVING...

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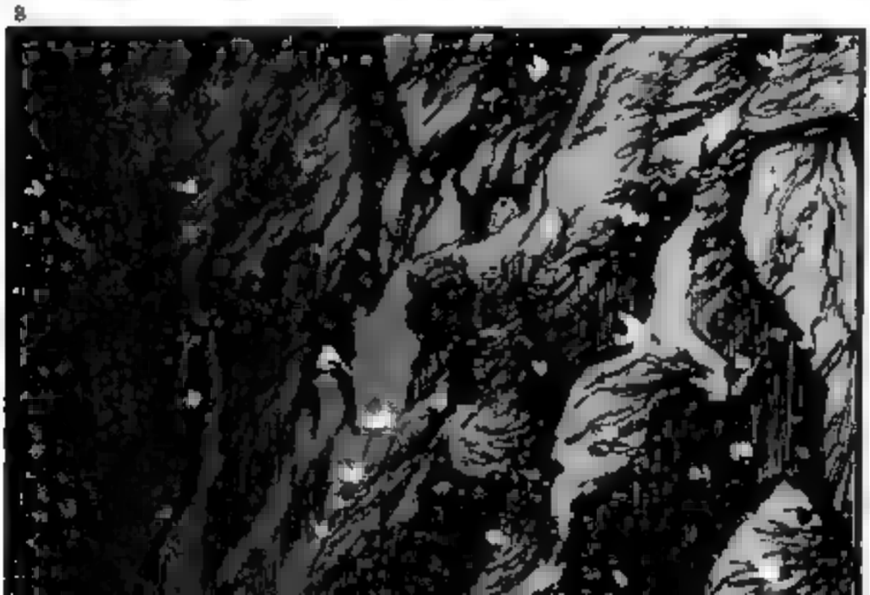
WAHAHAHA! I'D LOVE TO SEE THE STUPID LOOK ON HIS STUPID FACE!
HE REALIZED HE WAS DECEIVED BY GENSAI AND SHIZUNE...THOSE HE BELIEVED IN THE MOST.

WHAT OF SHUNJIRŌ-DONO?

HE'LL SURELY RECOVER... AND RACE TO REALIZE HIS DREAM ONCE AGAIN.
BUT IT'S SHUNJIRŌ-DONO I'M TALKING ABOUT.
WITH HIS DREAM DESTROYED, HE'LL CERTAINLY BE DEPRESSED.

THIS IS THE PLACE WHERE I CAN HAVE THE BEST VIEW.

I CAN ONLY WAIT AND REMAIN STILL...
SHIZUNE WILL MAKE HIS ENT-RANCE.
WHEN AND HOW



SHIZUNE-SAMA SAID TO WAIT, AND SO WE'LL WAIT AT THE GOLD MINE...
AS IF SHIZUNE-SAMA, THE SON OF GOD COULD REALLY DIE!
HE'S CERTAIN TO...
ガヤガヤ
ガヤガヤ
ガヤガヤ

I'LL CALL HIM!
THAT'S RIGHT! LET'S ASK SHUNJIRŌ-SAMA FOR HIS OPINION!
HASN'T ANYONE SEEN THEM!?
WHERE ON EARTH HAVE GENSAI-SAMA AND THE OTHERS GOTTEN TO!?
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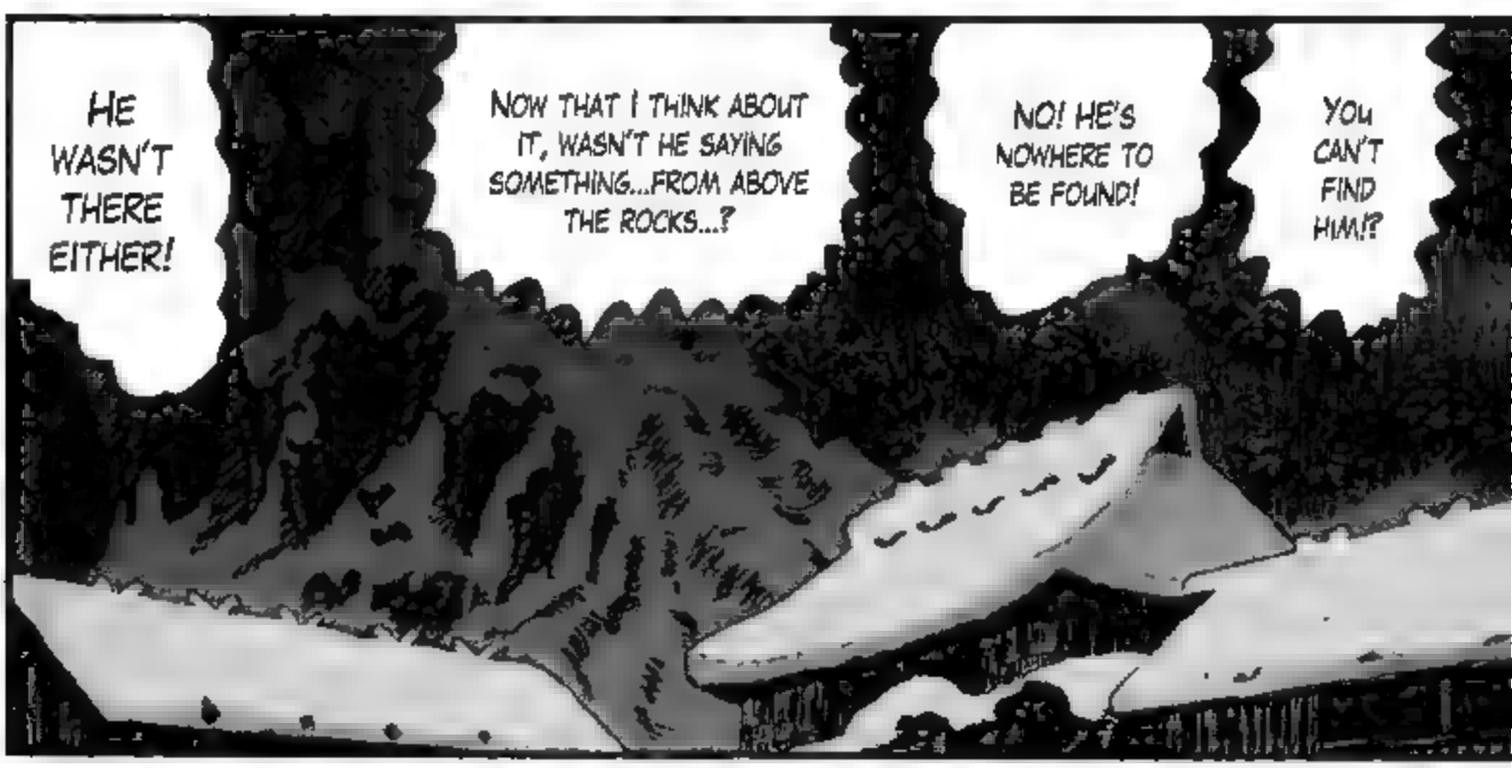
ガヤ
ガヤ


HE WASN'T THERE EITHER!
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, WASN'T HE SAYING SOMETHING...FROM ABOVE THE ROCKS...?
NO! HE'S NOWHERE TO BE FOUND!
YOU CAN'T FIND HIM!?

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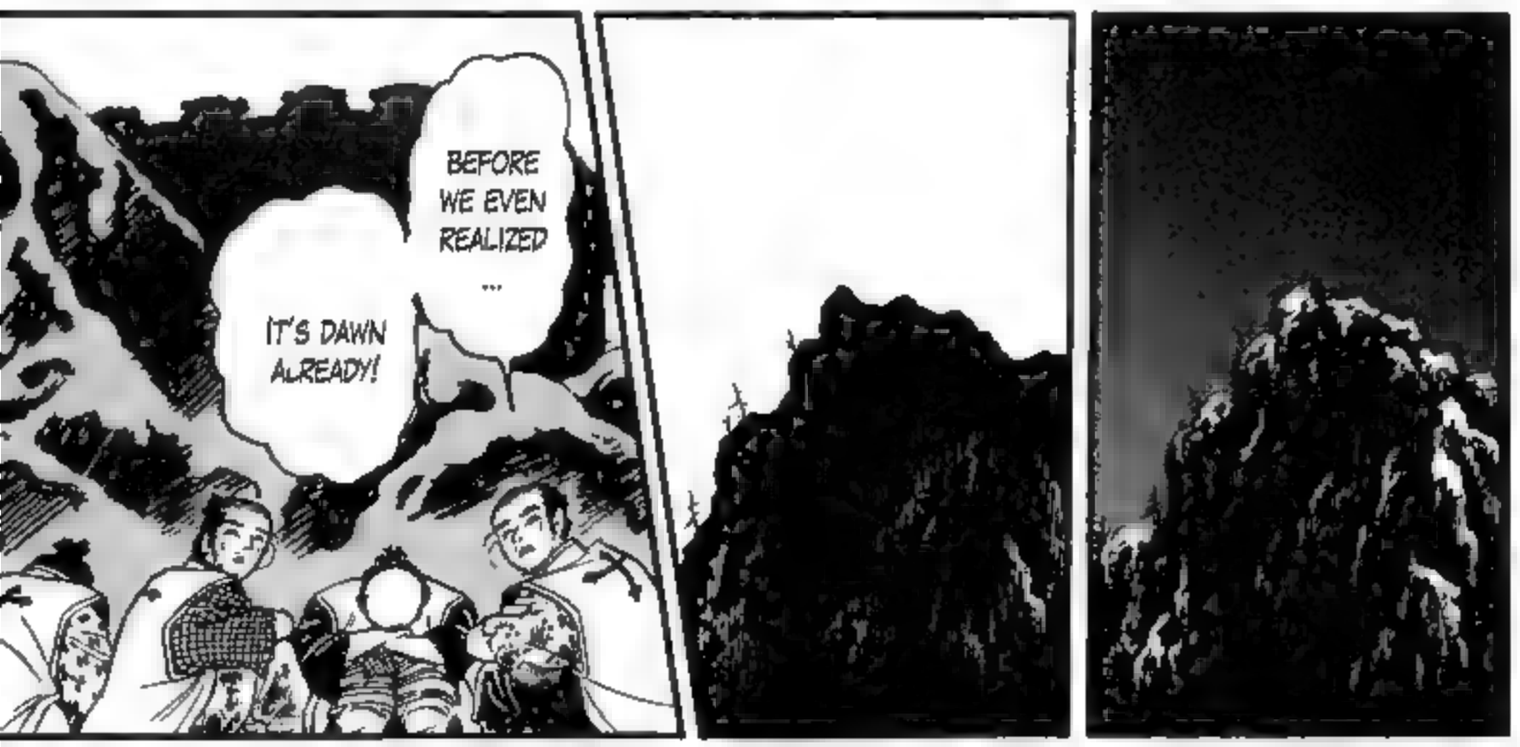
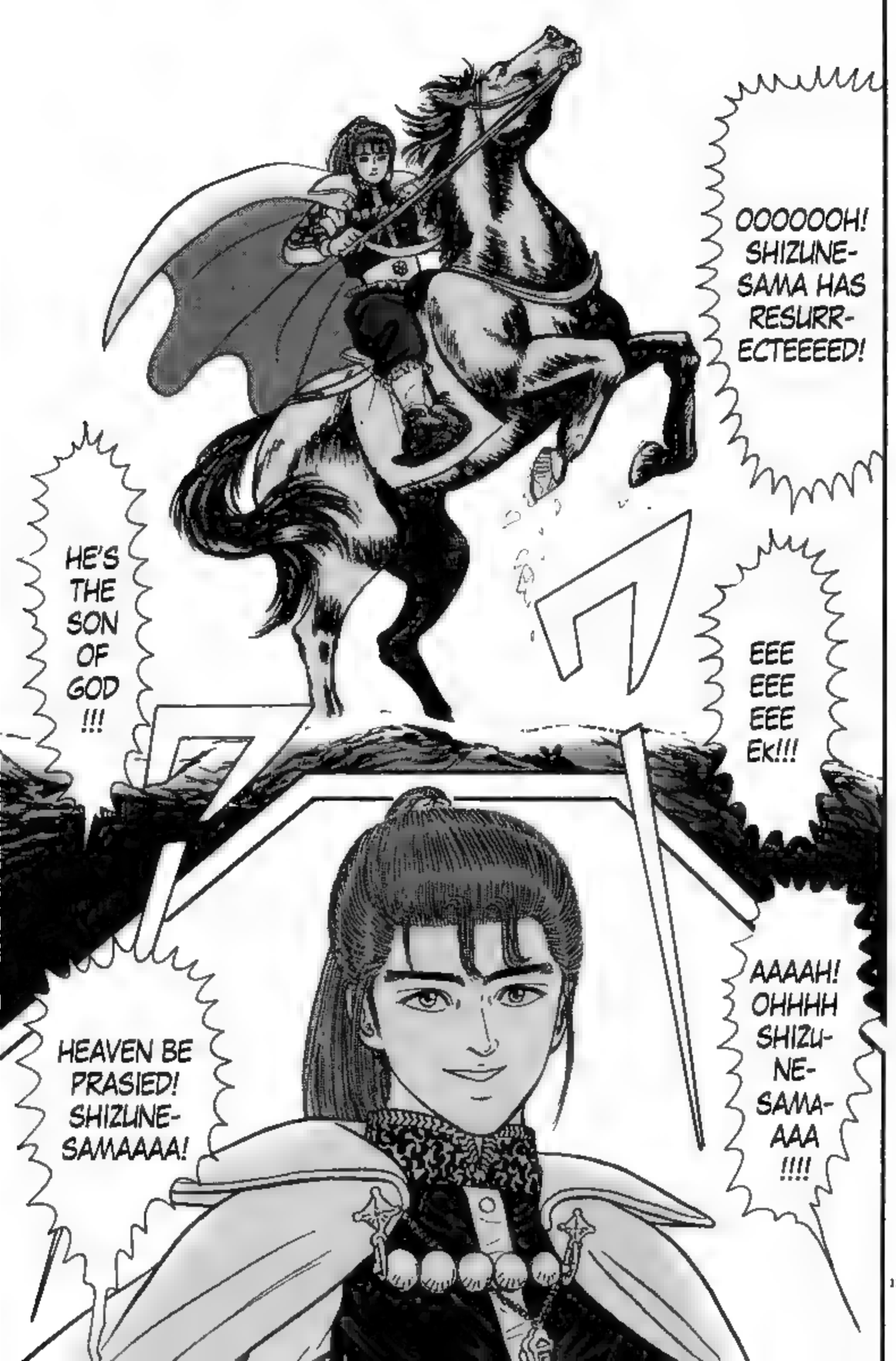
ガヤ


BEFORE WE EVEN REALIZED ...
IT'S DAWN ALREADY!

AAA AAA AAA AAH !!!!!
AHHHH! AHHHH!

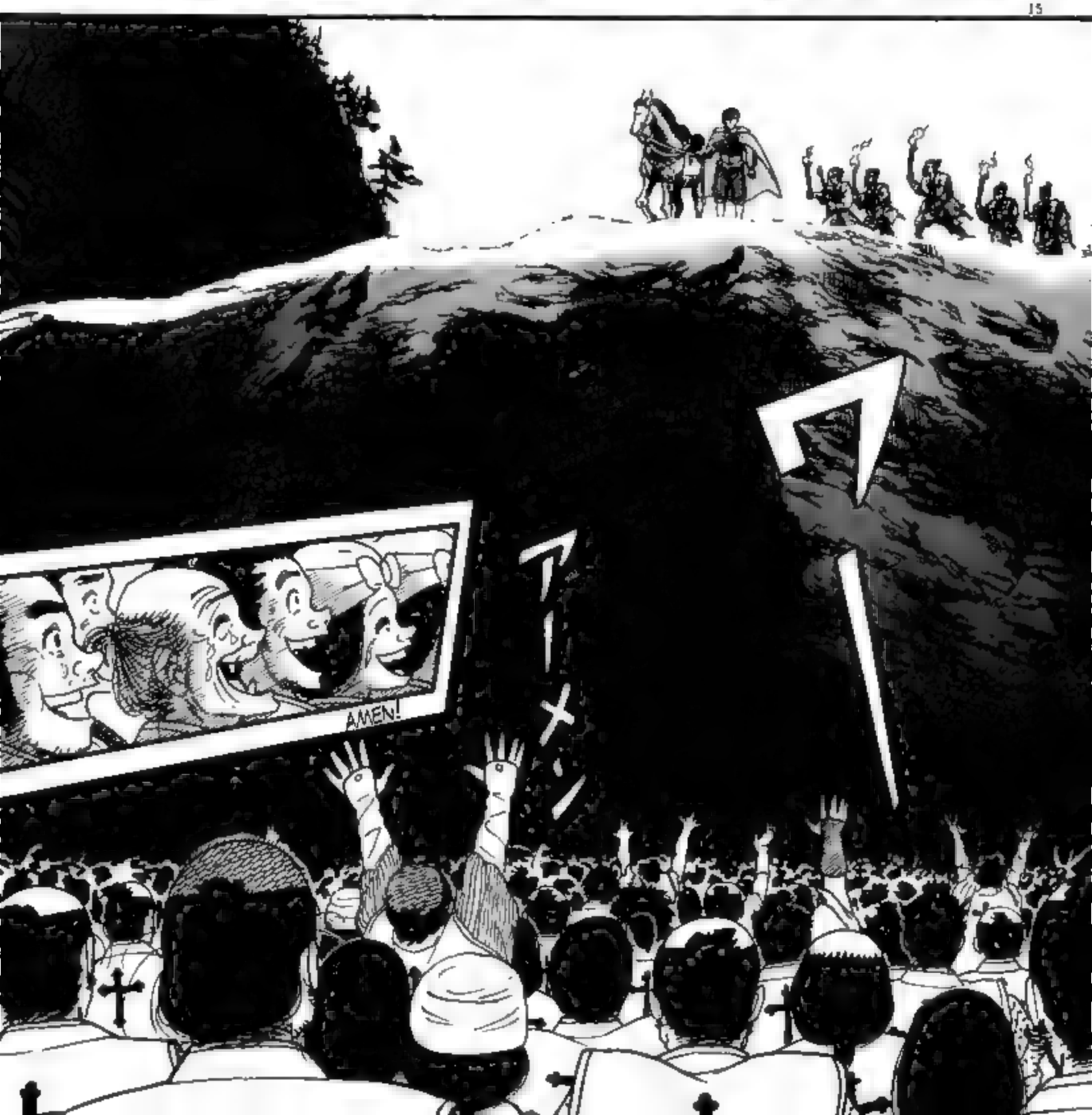
AAAA AAAH!
WHAT !?!?
AAAAAH! IT'S SHIZUNE-SAMAAAA!

HE'S RESURRECTED! HE IS THE TRUE SON OF GOOOD!
AAAAAAAH! SHIZUNE-SAMA TRULY LIVED!
SH-SHI-ZUNE-SAME!

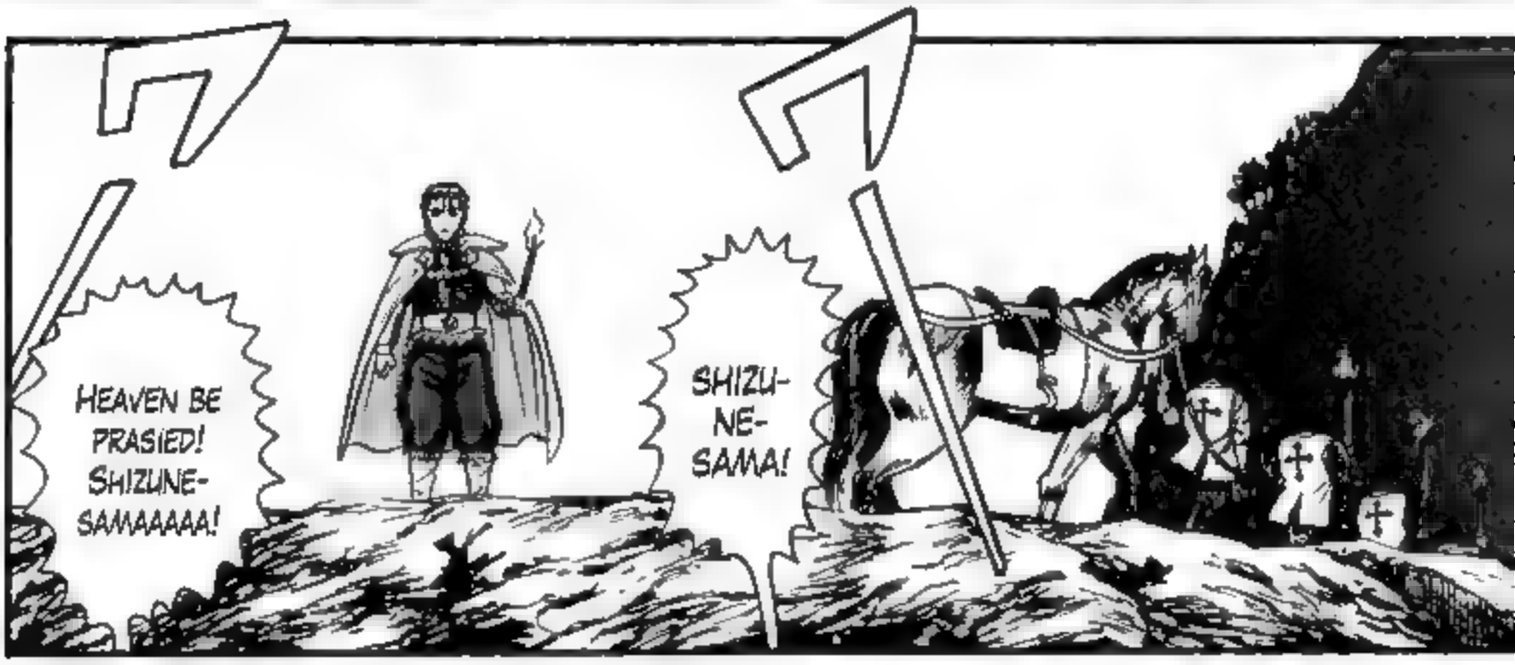

OOOOOOH! SHIZUNE-SAMA HAS RESURR-ECTEEEED!
HE'S THE SON OF GOD !!!
EEE EEE EEE Ek!!!
HEAVEN BE PRASIED! SHIZUNE-SAMAAAA!
AAAAH! OHHHH SHIZU-NE-SAMA-AAA !!!!

PRAISE GOD!!
IT'S SHIZU-NE-SA-MA!
AH!
14
HOORAY!
ばんざーい

GOD HAS RETURNED TO US!


AMEN!

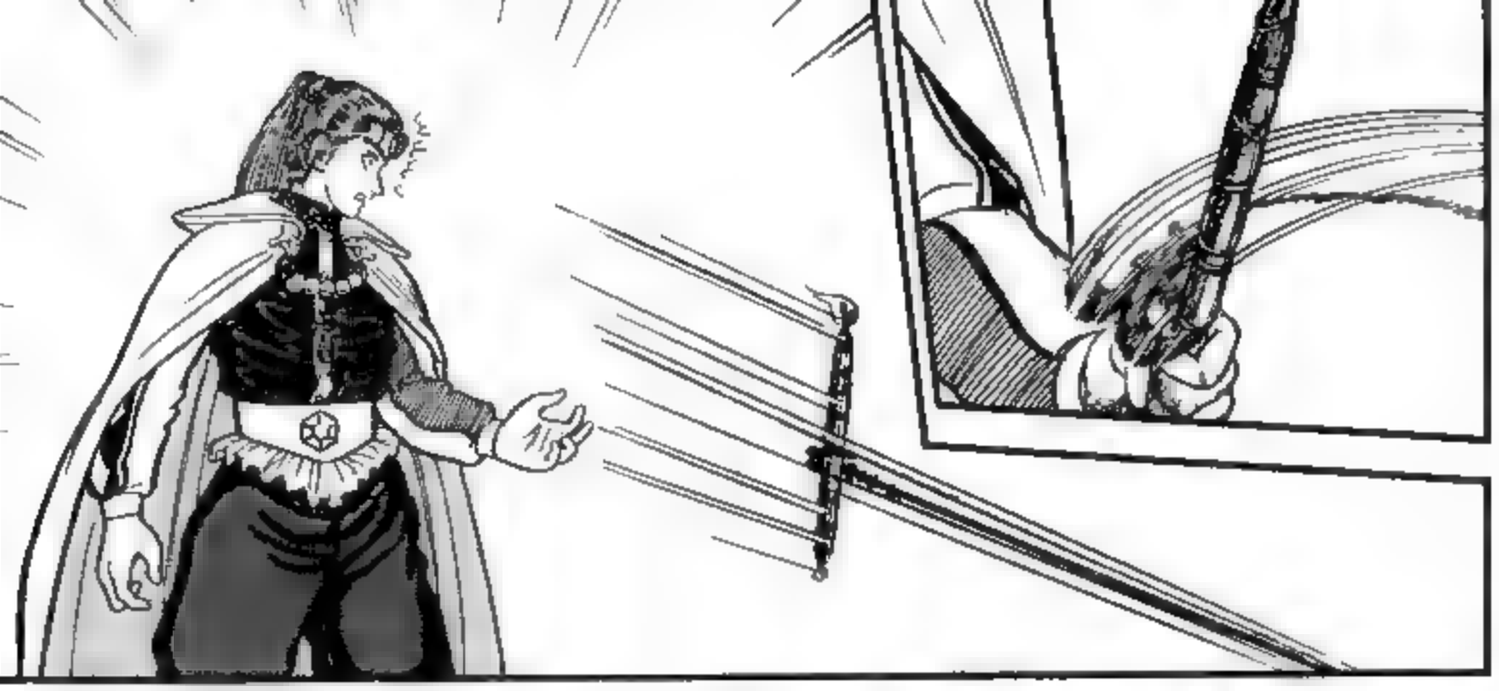
SIR!
YES!
MMM. THEN OFF TO YOUR ASSIGNED POSITIONS.
AS PER YOUR INSTRUCTIONS, PREPARATIONS HAVE BEEN FULLY COMPLETED.


HEAVEN BE PRASIED! SHIZUNE-SAMAAAAA!
SHIZU-NE-SAMA!

IT'S LIKELY SHE WON'T APPROACH ME EASILY...
SINCE SHE KNOWS OF MY GUN...

SHE SHOULD BE SOMEWHERE AROUND HERE...
AZUMI..

AND HIDING AMONG THEM...?
IS SHE IN DIS-GUISE



AND IF YOU TRY TO JUMP, YOU'D LIKELY MORTALLY INJURE YOURSELF.
YOU HAVE NO TIME TO SUMMON THE PEOPLE TO BE YOUR SHIELD.
AT THIS DIST-ANCE,
.....

WHY ARE YOU GOING SO FAR TO KILL SO MANY PEOPLE!?
HAVING OIL FLOWING INTO THE MINE TUNNELS AND BLOWING UP THE EXIT...

WHY DON'T YOU REALIZE IT!?
OPEN YOUR EYES! WAKE UP!
DON'T YOU SEE!?
AZUMI ...
.....

YOU!
ME AND
WE'RE DIFFERENT FROM THE RABBLE DOWN THERE!
WE'RE DIFFERENT BEINGS!

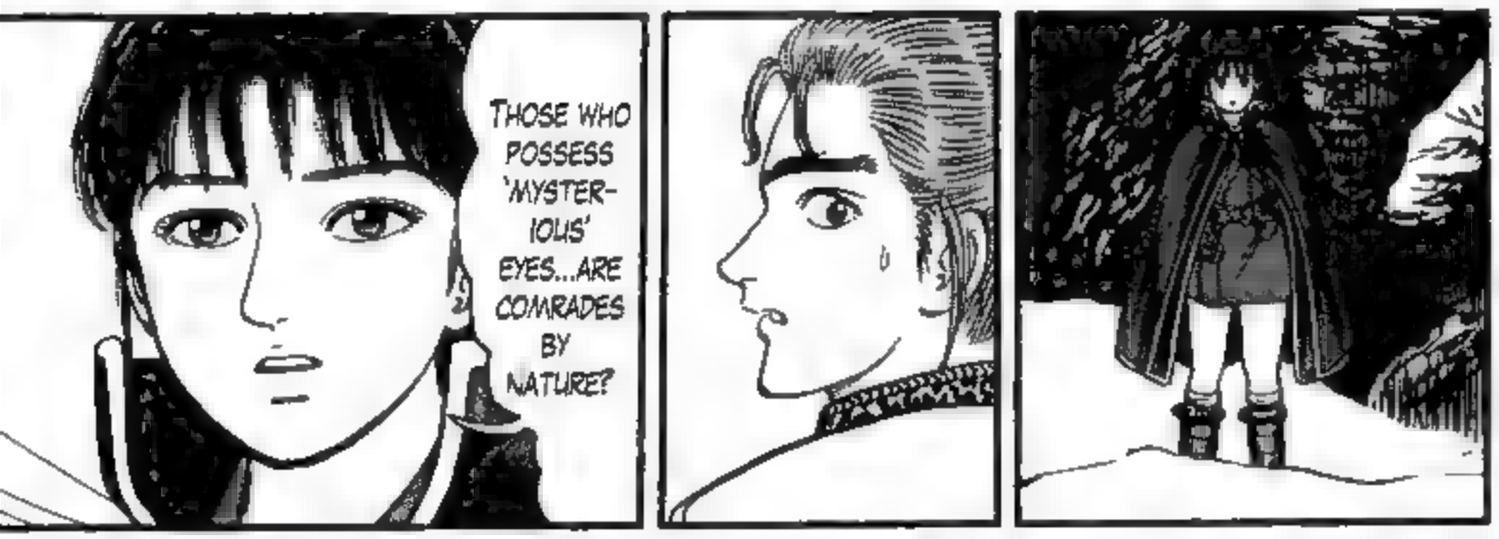
WHY YOU AND I HAVE DIFFERENTLY COLORED EYES FROM ALL THOSE PEOPLE!?
WHAT!?

THOSE WITH THE MYSTERIOUS EYES
THAT ARE THE COLOR OF THE DEEP SEA
ARE GOD'S ENVOYS! BORN TO CONTROL THE FOOLISH MASSES AND GUIDE THEM!

EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE A WOMAN, WHY, AZUMI, DID YOU BECOME SO STRONG...?
AND HOW DO I HAVE THE ABILITY TO MANIPULATE MEN TO SUCH AN EXTENT?
GOD GRANTED THESE ABILITIES TO US! THE ONES WITH MYSTERIOUS EYES!

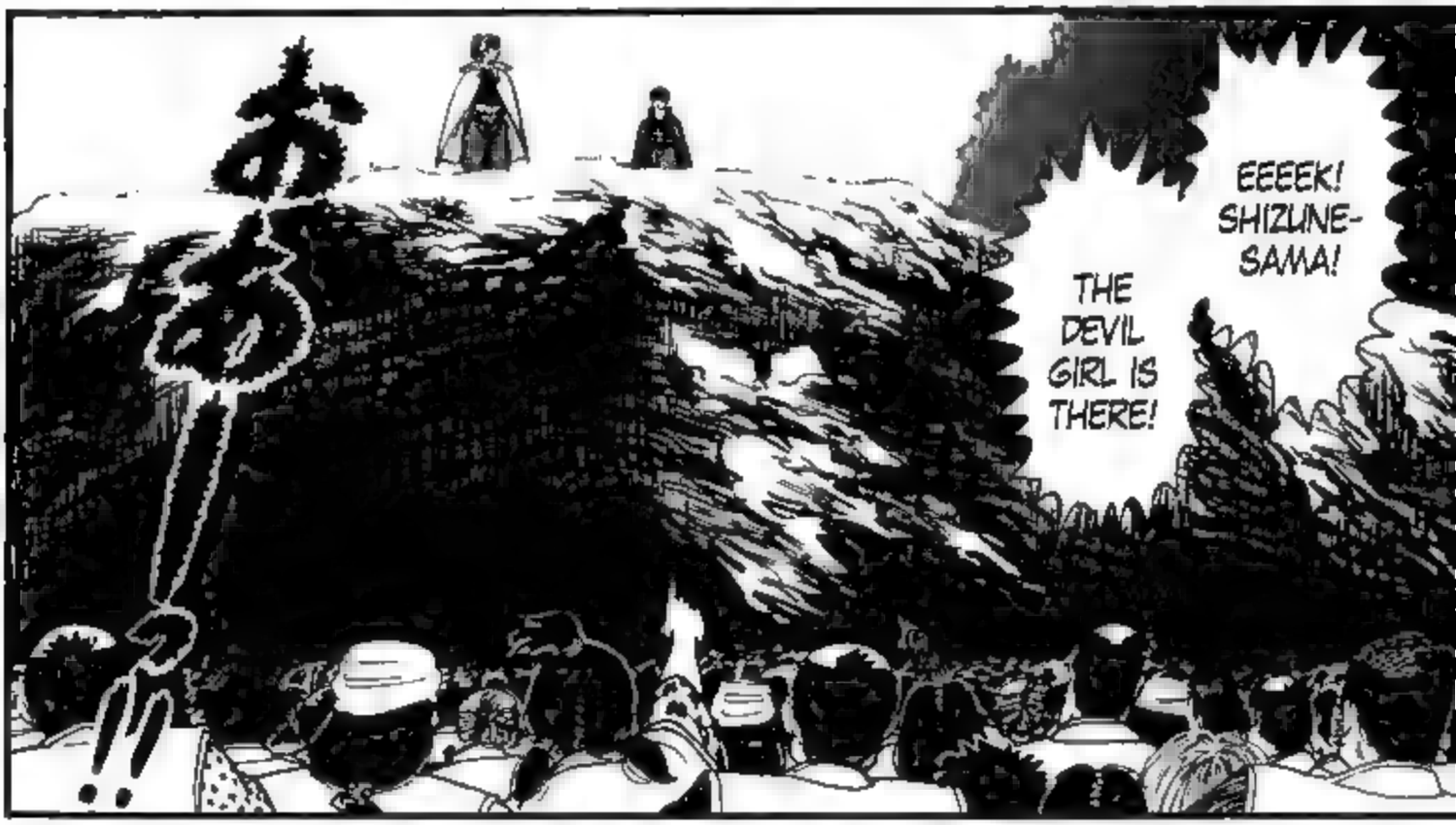
IF YOU KILL YOUR ELDER BROTHER, GOD WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU!
YOU AND I ARE SIBLINGS BORN FROM GOD!

TOGETH-
ER, HAND
IN HAND,
LET US
DIRECT
AND GUIDE
THESE
FOOLISH
PEOPLE!


THOSE WHO
POSSESS
'MYSTER-
IOUS'
EYES...ARE
COMRADES
BY
NATURE?

BECAUSE YOU HAVE THOSE
EYES, AZUMI, YOU'VE BEEN
PERSECUTED FOR NO
OTHER REASON!
THAT'S
RIGHT!
THOSE FOOLS
BELOW...THEY FEAR
EYES LIKE OURS, AND
TWINS AS WELL! THEY
LOATHE THEM!

IT'S THAT DEVIL GIRL!!!
AHH!


EEEEK! SHIZUNE-SAMA!
THE DEVIL GIRL IS THERE!

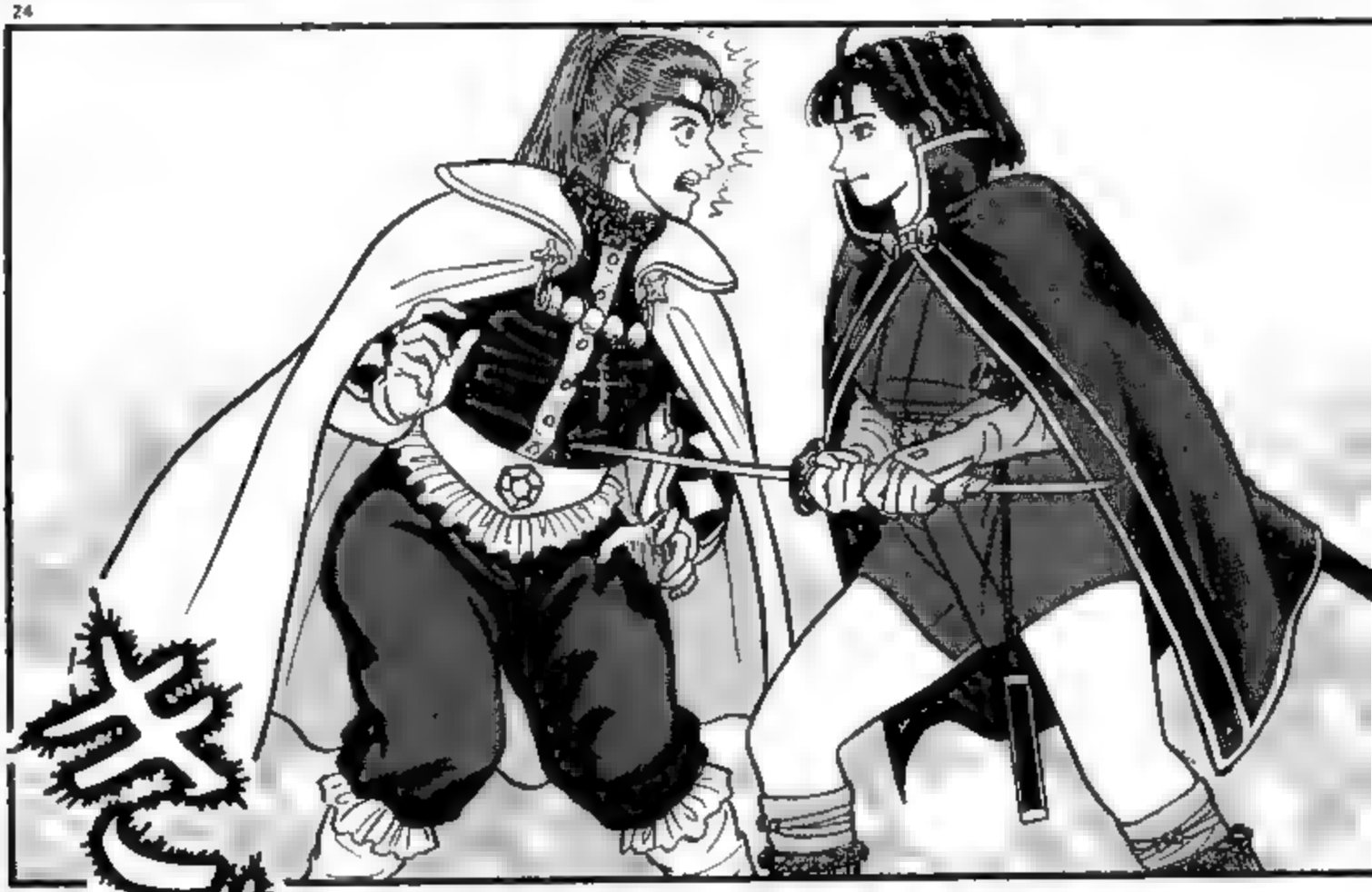
AND YOU WERE SPIRITED AWAY AND RAISED SOME-WHERE ELSE TO HIDE YOU FROM SOCIETY, RIGHT!?
YOU WERE ALSO ABANDONED BY YOUR MOTHER BECAUSE SHE FEARED PERSECUTION, NO!?
YOU MUST HAVE GROWN IN A WAY SIMILAR TO THIS!

SHIZUNE-SAMAAAA! RUN AWAAAY!!!!
PERSE-CUTE US!
ENVY US!
THOSE FOOLS WITH SUCH DINGY BLACK EYES...THEY FEAR US, THOSE WITH TALENT!

I KNOW THIS WELL!
IT WAS MORT-IFYING, NO?

SURELY YOU'VE CURSED THOSE BLUE EYES COUNTLESS TIMES!
HOW MUCH HAVE YOU SUFF-ERED!?

WE'RE SIBLINGS AFTER ALL!



F-F-
FOOL
!!!!
.....
HYAAAH!
DAMN DEMOOON!
EEEK!!
25
F...F-
FOOOL!
WHYYY
YYY!?
I WAS NEVER PERSECUTED,
JUST FOR YOUR INFORMATION.
I GREW UP SURROUNDED BY
KIND FRIENDS WHO LOVED ME
FOR WHO I WAS.

Y-
YOUUU
LIIIIIE
!!!!
!!
.....
uuuu
SHIZUNE-
SAMAAAA!
DAMN
YOOOU!

KILL HEEER!
DON'T LET HER ESC-APE!
DAMN IT! TOTALLY SURROUN-DED!
オ
28
BEAT THE DEMON TO DEATH!
CUT HER TO PIECES !!!!!

CHAPTER 6:
THE SNOW AND
THE FAREWELL

DON'T LET HER ESCAPE!
SHE'S RUNNING AWAY!
BEAT HER TO DEATH!

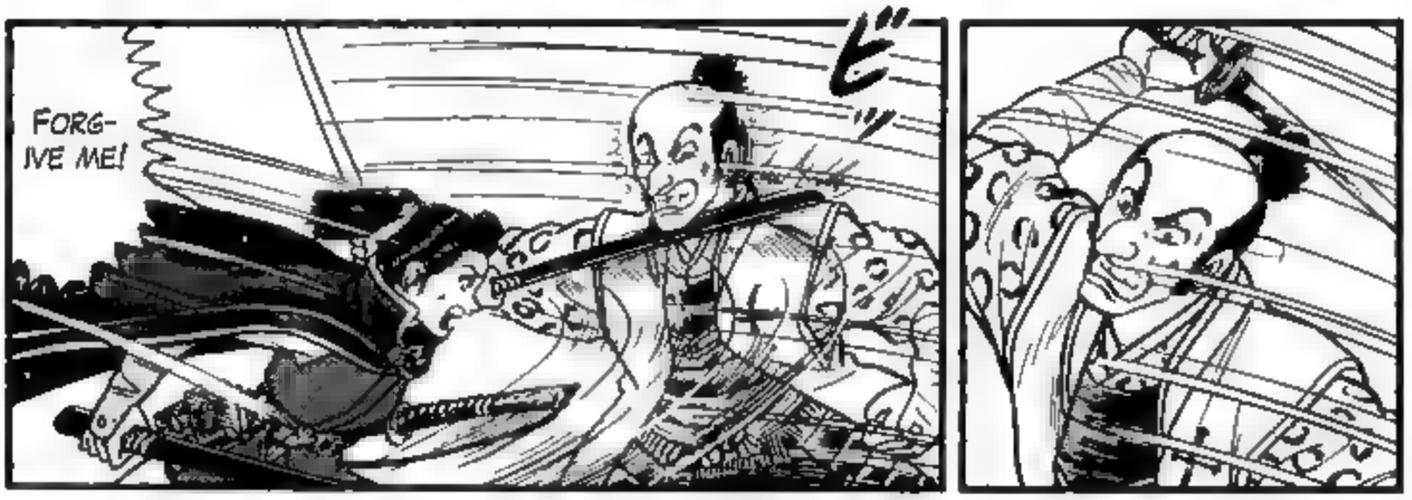
2

DAMN DEMOOOOOOON!
HOW DARE YOU MURDER SHIZUNE-SAMA!!!!

AH! THERE SHE IS!

CUT HER TO BITS!
KILL HEEE EEEE EEER!

GYAH!


FORG-
IVE ME!

FORGIVE
ME!!!

NOW ..THE FIELDS ARE FULL OF CORPSES.

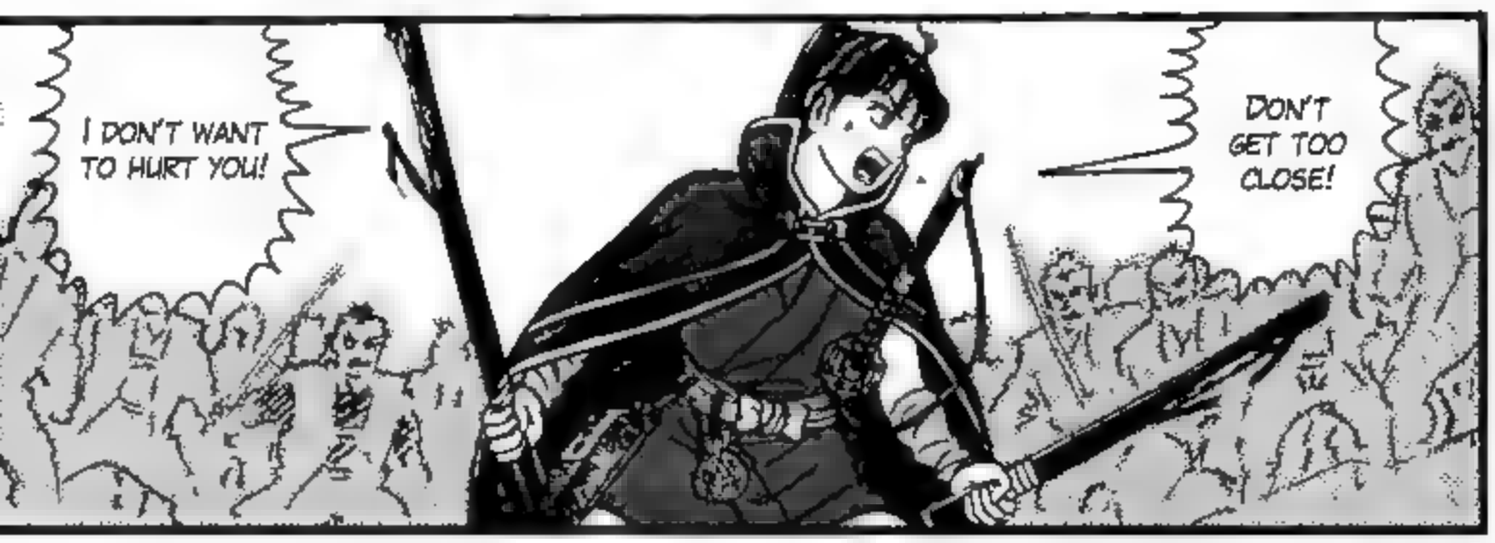
TOGETHER WITH ALL THE OTHERS.
WE'LL HOLD A FUNERAL.

.....
.....

MY REAL DADDY... HE'S GONE TO THE NEXT WORLD WHERE ALL THE GODS ARE, RIGHT?
THIS DADDY HERE...HE'S JUST AN EMPTY SHELL NOW...
THAT IS WHY
SO...
HE'LL ALWAYS BE WATCHING OVER YOU.
OH, YES!
YES!!

GROW UP STRONG! PUT YOUR FATHER'S SOUL AT EASE!
YOU MUST NOT LOSE HEART!

BEAT THE DEMON GIRL DOWN!
KILL HER!
CUT HER DOOOWN !!!


I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU!
DON'T GET TOO CLOSE!

DEMOO OOOO OOON!

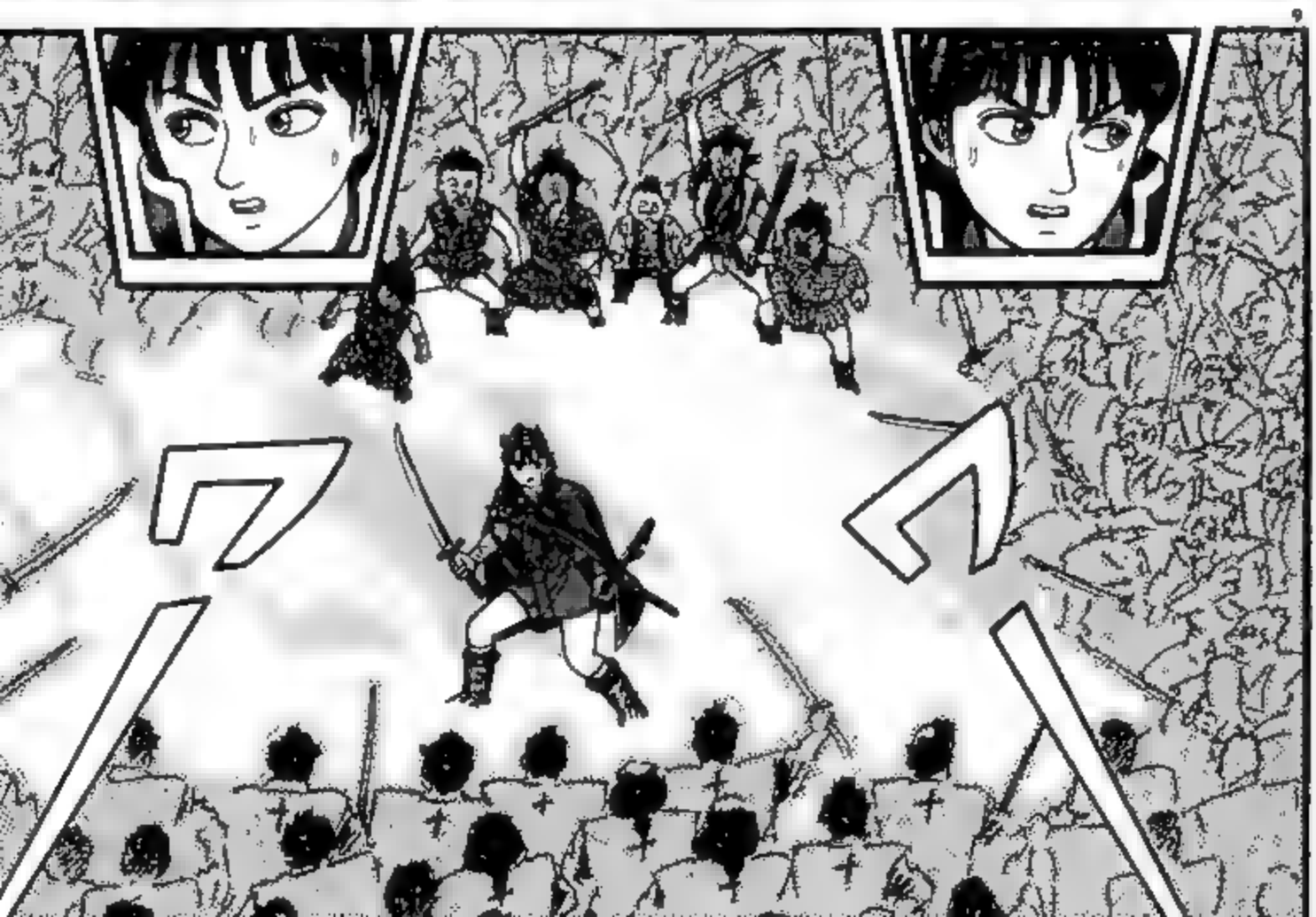
あおお

THE NEXT ONE TO ATTACK ME DIES!
I'LL KILL YOU!

KILL IT! KILL THE DEMON!
DAMNED DEMON!

LET'S GET HEEER!

DEMON GIIIIRL!
RIP HER APART!

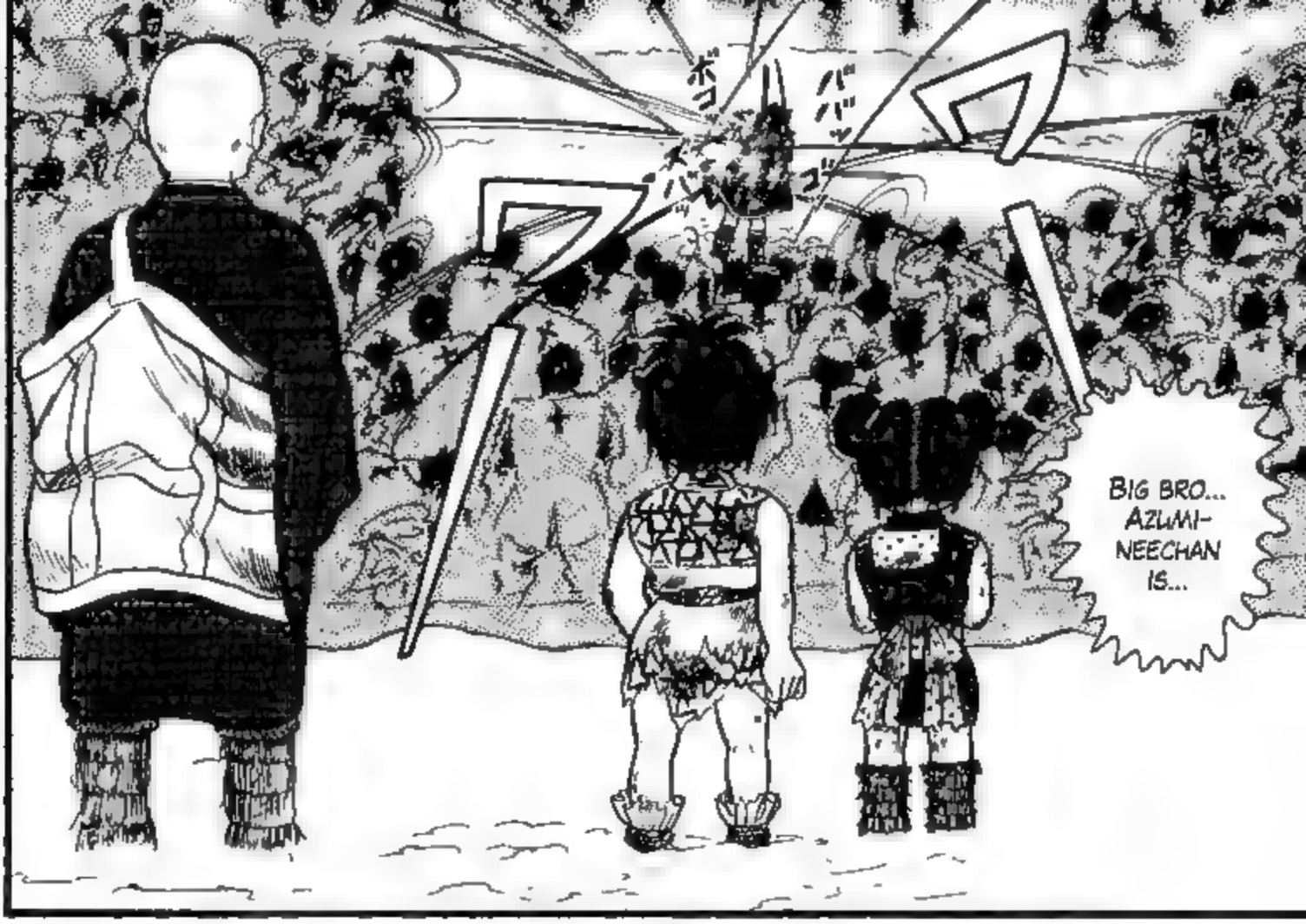


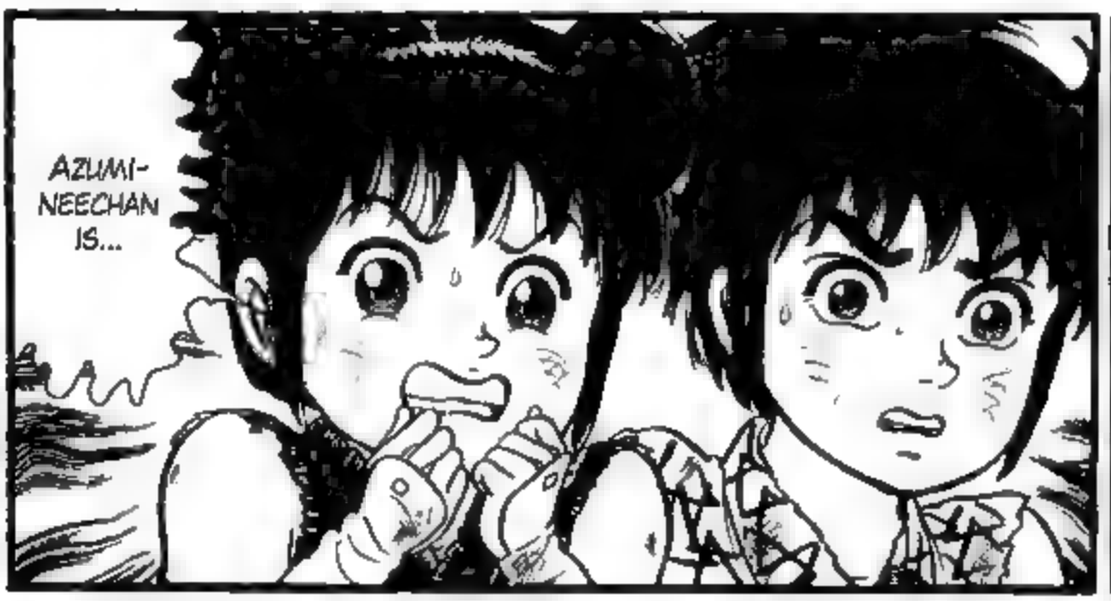
MONS-
TEEER!

UOO
OOH!
BEAT
HER
DOWN!

GET
HEEE
EEER!

ハッ
ハッ
ボッ
GET SOME STONES TO TOSS AT HER!
DON'T JUST THROW SNOW!
おお
鬼や
やれ
ボコ
ドカ
ハッ
ハッ
ハッ
……

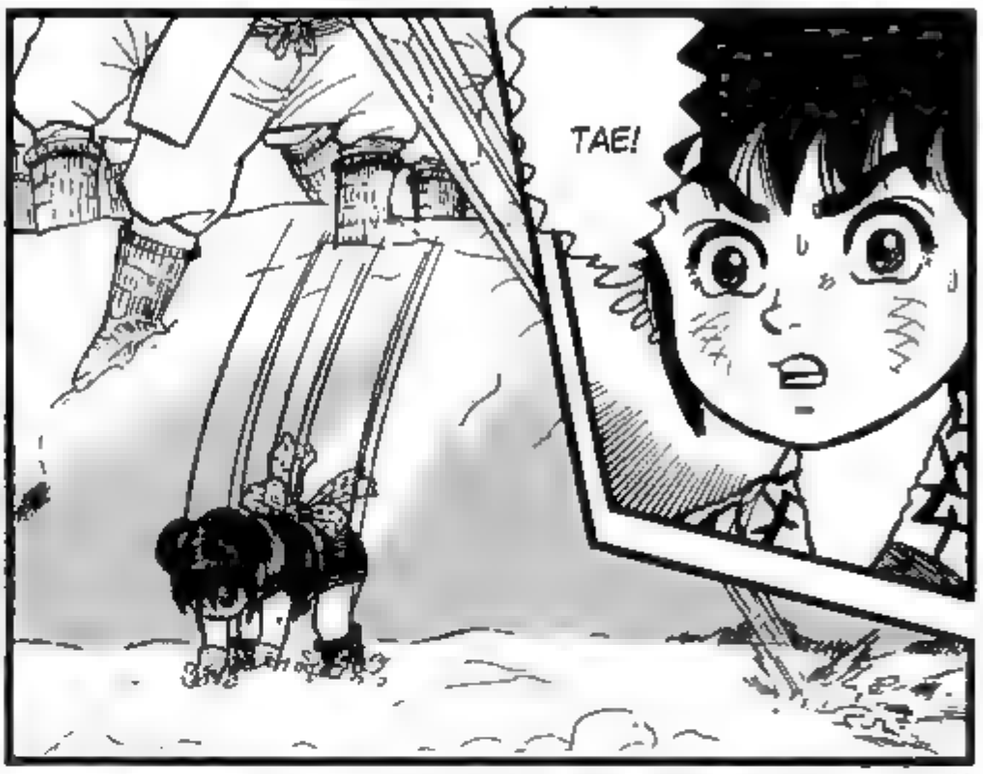

ボコ
バッ
バッ
ゴ
BIG BRO... AZUMI-NEECHAN IS...

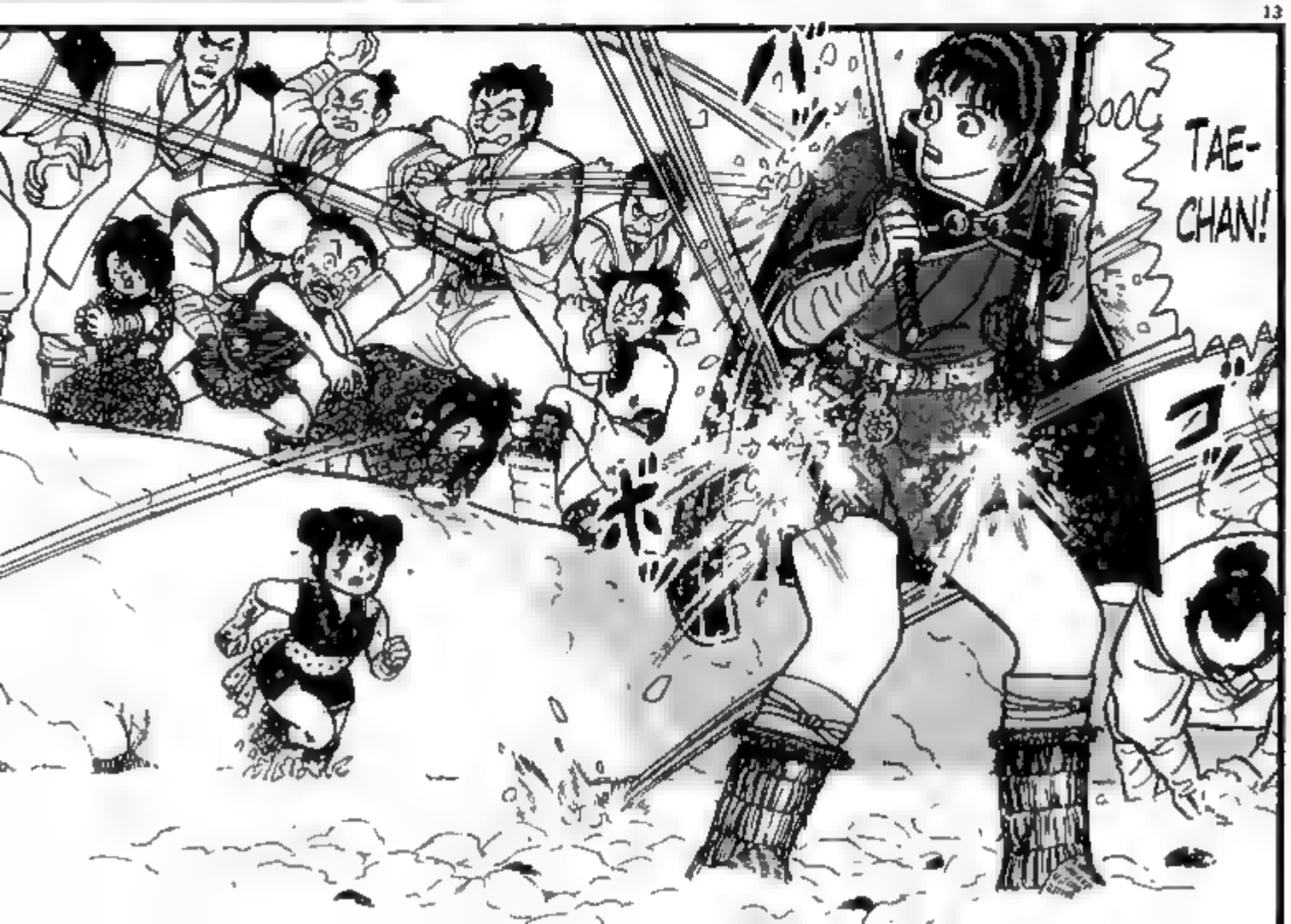

AZUMI-NEECHAN IS...

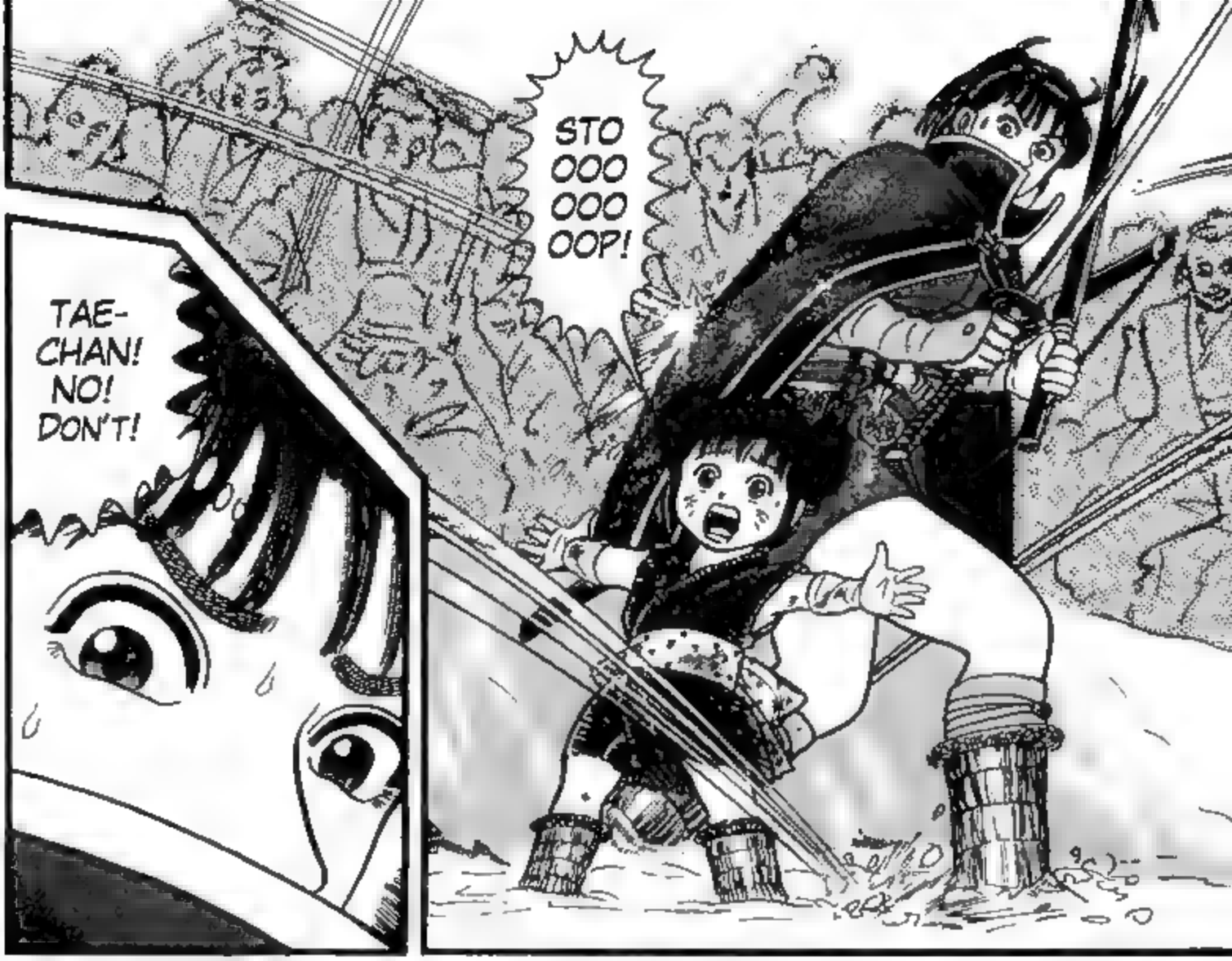
……

AZUMI-NEECHAN!
AZUMI-NEE-CHAN...

!!

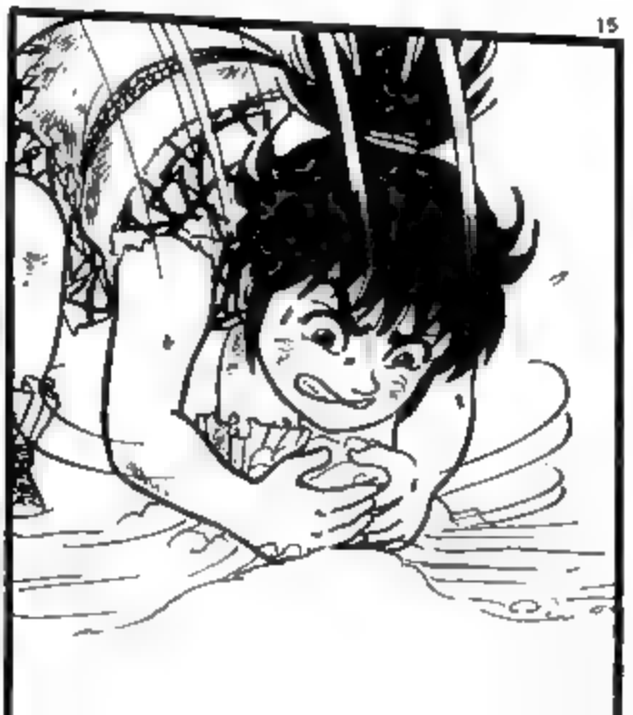

TAE!


TAE-
CHAN!


STO
OOO
OOO
OOP!
TAE-
CHAN!
NO!
DON'T!

AIN'T
THAT
GACCHI
THERE!?
OH,
GACCHI!?

YOU DAMN DEMOO OOOON!



16
MONS-
TEEEE
EEEE
EEEE
EEER
!!!!!

AZUMI-
NEECHAN
...
.....
GOOD, GACCHI! GOOD! LIKE THAT!
.....
17

DEMON! YOU DAMN MONS-TER!!!
ボコ
ゴバ
バババッ
ボバッ
TOGE-THER NOW!
MORE! HIT HER MORE!

!!
AZUMI-DONO! HURRY THIS WAY!
YOU MUST STOP!

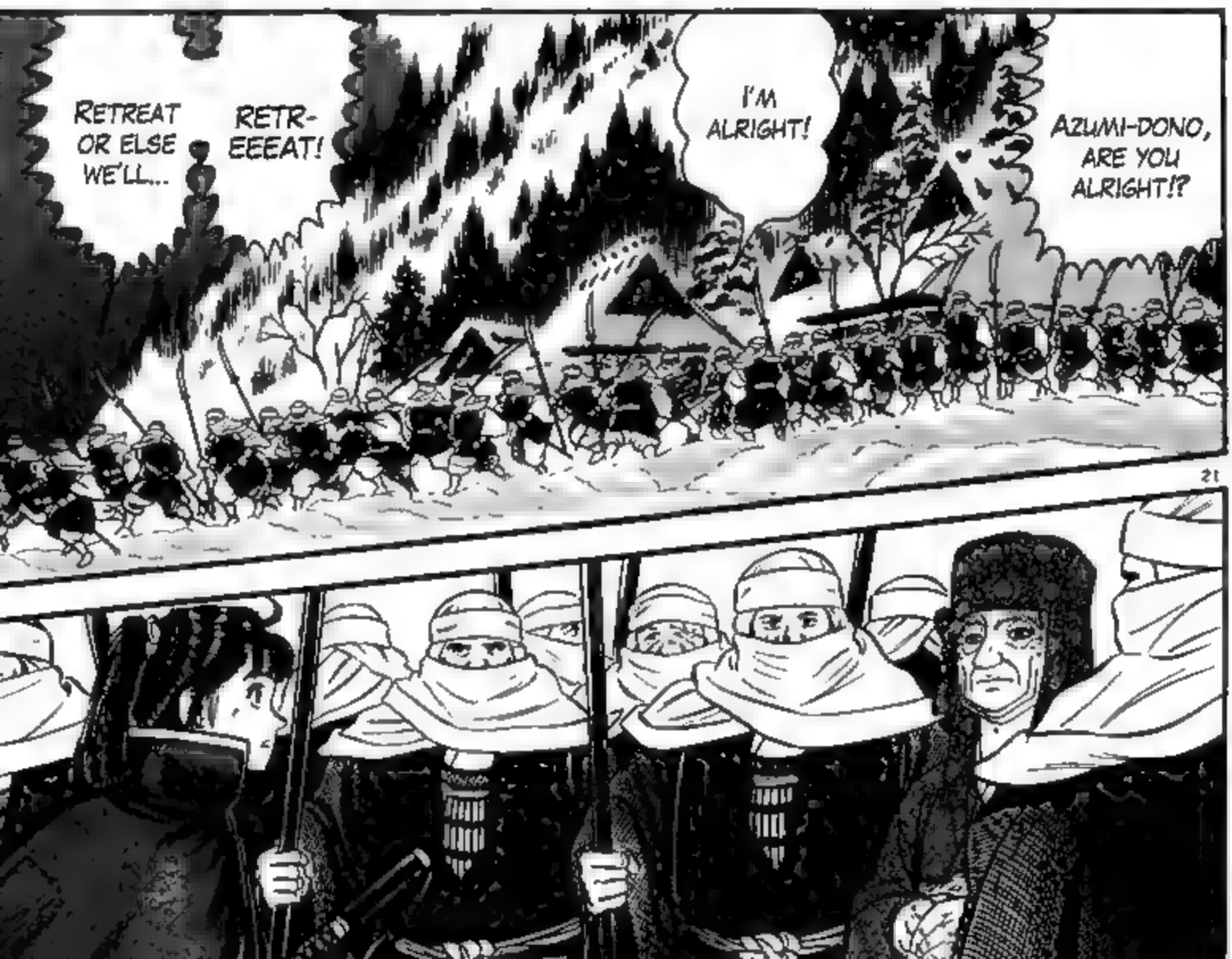
GAAH!!!

DON'T LET HER GET AWAAAY!
DON'T LET HER GET AWAY!

CATCH HER! KILL HEEEER!

BIG BRO...
BIG BRO...

UUUU UUUUU UUU ...
GHHH...
HIC... SOB!
UUUUU
UU UUGH ...
GHH HHH HHH!


RETREAT OR ELSE WE'LL...
RETR- EEEAT!
I'M ALRIGHT!
AZUMI-DONO, ARE YOU ALRIGHT!?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HARD WORK.

I FAILED TO STOP THE REVOLT BEFORE IT BROKE OUT...AND SO MANY PEOPLE DIED AS A RESULT.

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO APOLOGIZE.

YOU DID VERY WELL!

DO NOT TROUBLE YOURSELF

WE WERE ON THE VERGE OF BEING BLOWN APART BY CANNONS!
YOU EVEN SAVED OUR OWN LIVES!
I HEAR

THANK YOU!
WE SURVIVED THANKS TO YOU, AZUMI-DONO!
YOU HAVE OUR THANKS !!!

YOU'LL BE THROWN INTO HELL!
DEMON GIRL! YOU'LL BE JUDGED BY HEAVEN!
.....

AAAAAAH! SHIZUNE-SAMA WE MURDERED!
SHIZUNE-SAMAAAA!

TOBIZARU...IT SEEMS EVEN THOUGH THEY SEARCHED FOR HIM, HE HASN'T BEEN FOUND.
I'D LIKE TO GO SEARCH FOR HIM AS WELL.
AZUMI. NOW IS THE TIME TO DEPART.

YOU KNOW WHAT AWAITS YOU?
IF YOU GO OUT AND YOU GET CAUGHT...

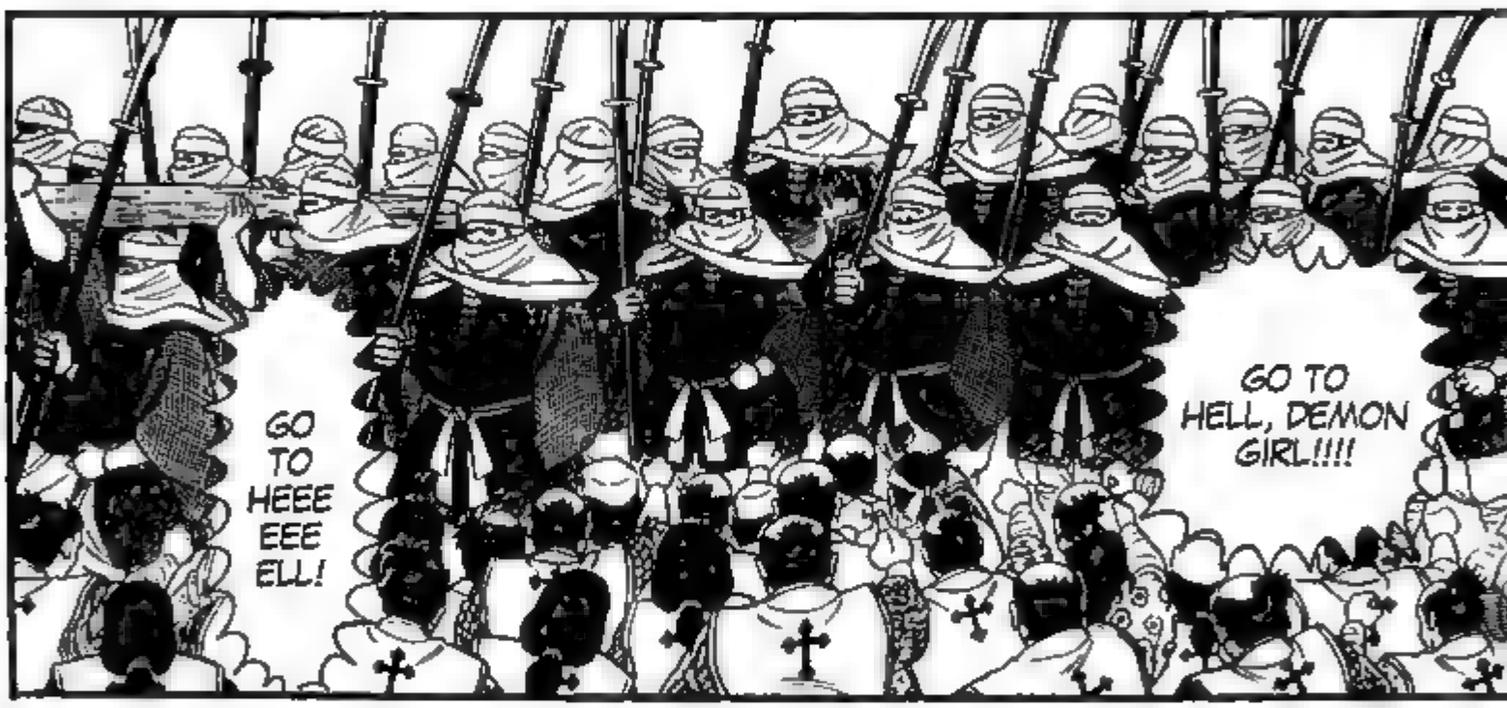
I'LL BE FINE!

I NEED TO SEARCH AT THE VALLEY NEAR SHIZUNE'S HOUSE.
YOU DEPART WITH ME.
LEAVE THAT TO THE ONES WHO WILL CLEAN UP AFTER.

I'LL ORDER KAGARI AND HATSUNE TO SEARCH FOR TOBIZARU NOW.
I'LL ENTRUST THAT ROLE TO THOSE WHO CAN HANDLE IT!
DON'T ACT BASED ON FEELING ALONE!
AZUMI,

.....
NOW YOU DEPART THESE LANDS WITH ME!
YOU'VE CARRIED OUT YOUR ROLE SPLENDIDLY.

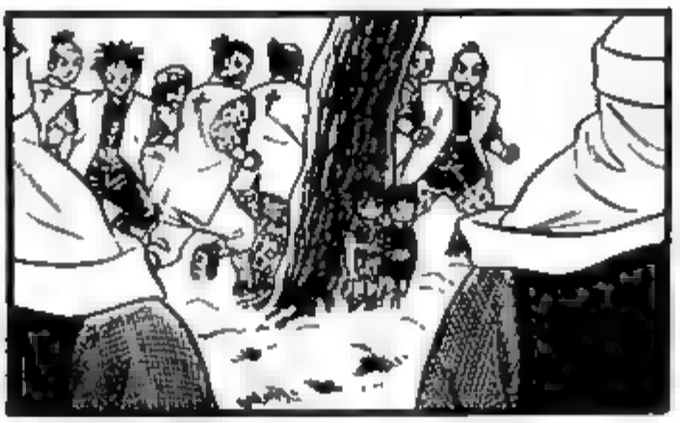
DAMN DEMOOO OOON!
HEAVEN WILL JUDGE YOOOOOU!


GO TO HEEE EEE ELL!
GO TO HELL, DEMON GIRL!!!!

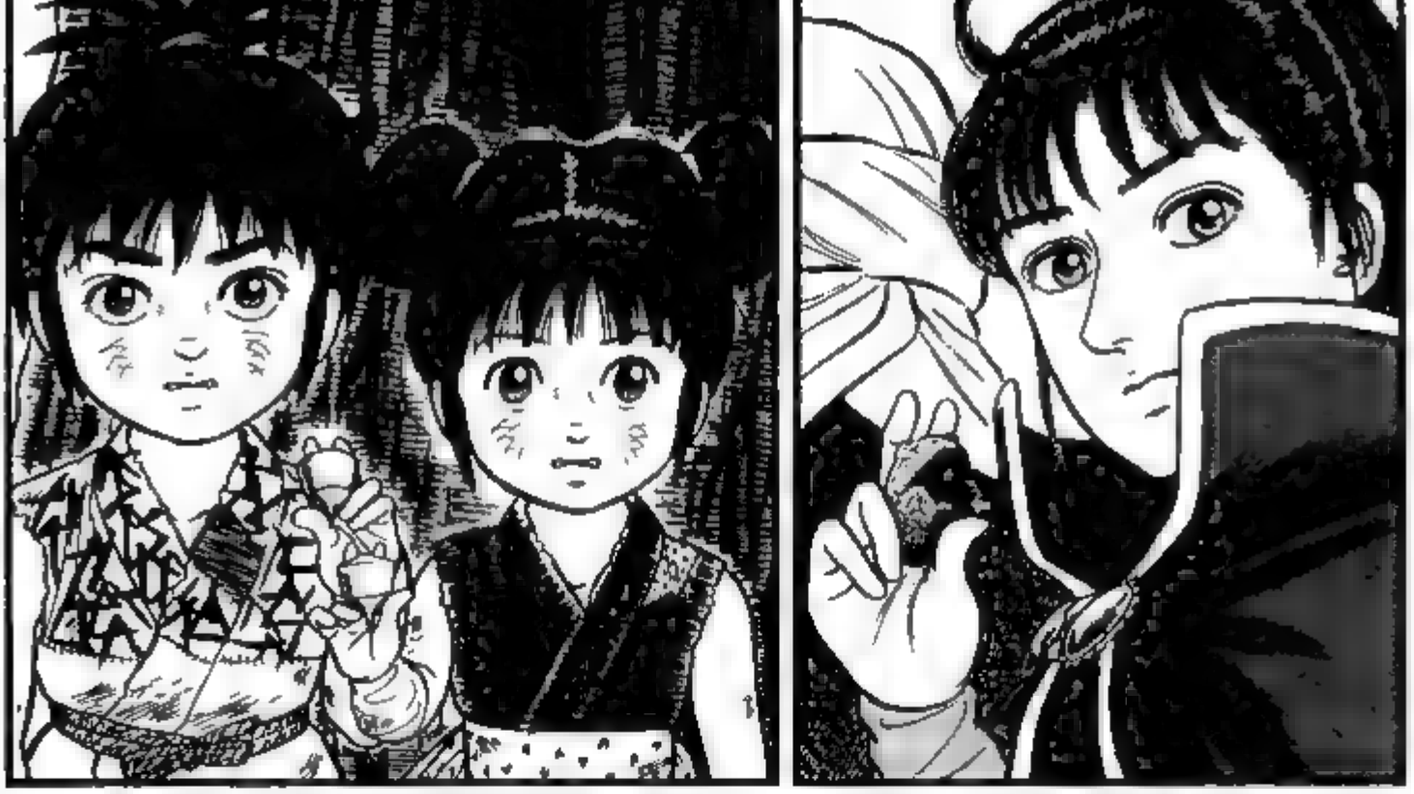
SUFFER IN AGONY IN THE HELL OF ETERNAL SUFFERING!
SUFFER FOREVERMORE!
YOU SHALL
DEMON! MURDERER OF GOD'S SON, THE GREAT SHIZUNE!

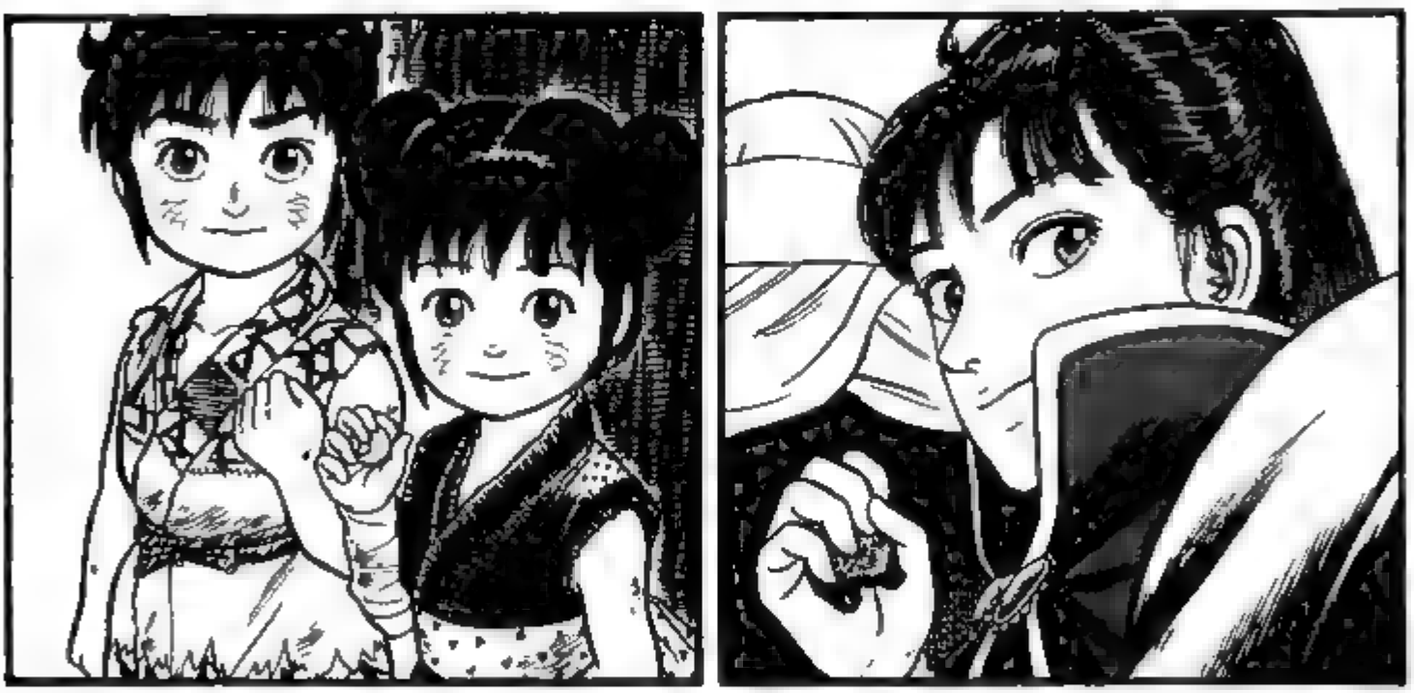
BUT YOU WON'T DIE EASY!
YOU'LL LINGER IN EXCRUCIATING PAIN FOR ALL OF ETERNITY!
BURN IN HELLFIRE! YOUR BODY WILL BE RENT APART!

TAE-CHAN.
GACCHI.



SUFFER FOREVER, DEMON GIRL!
SUFFER!





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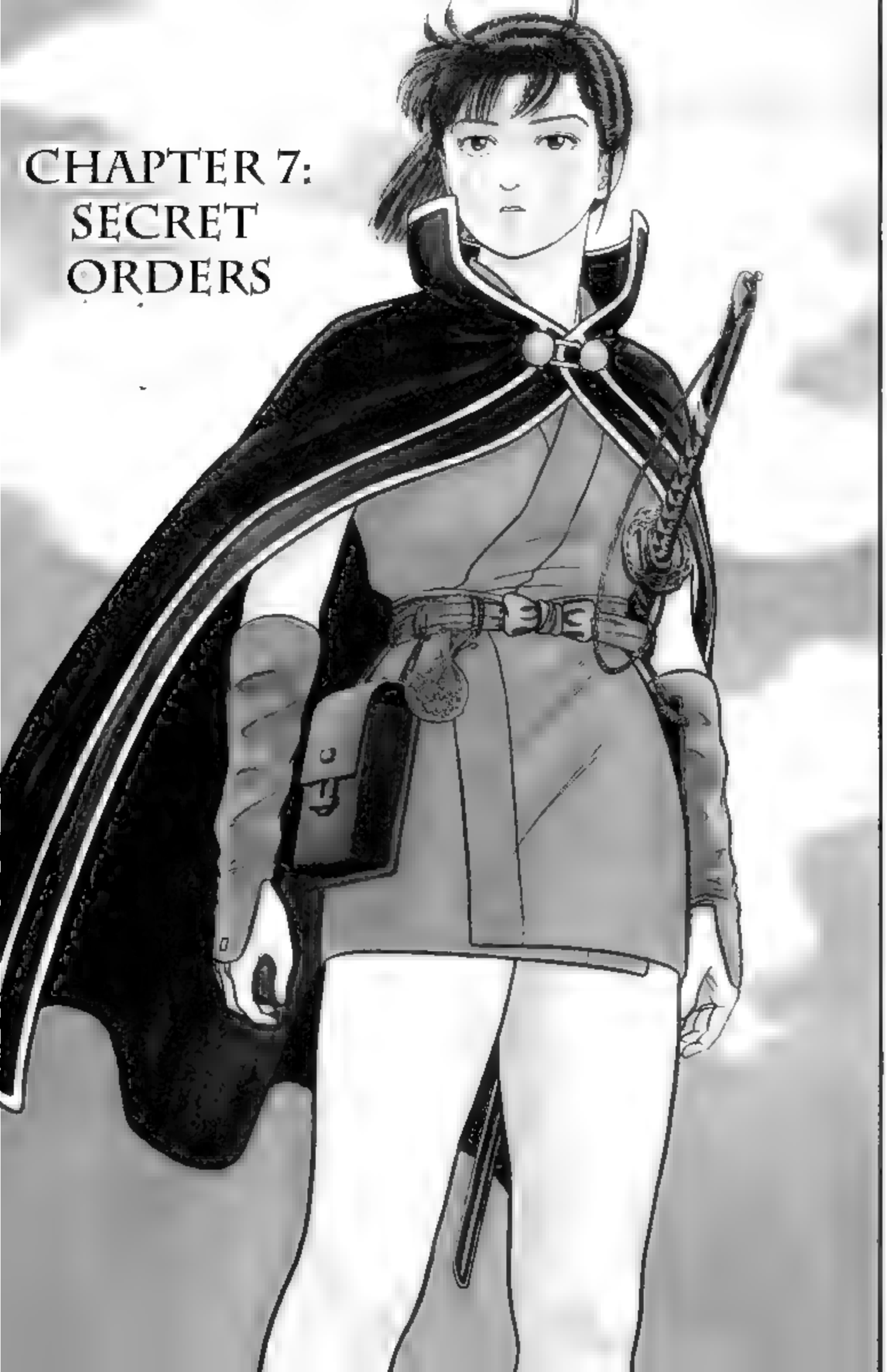
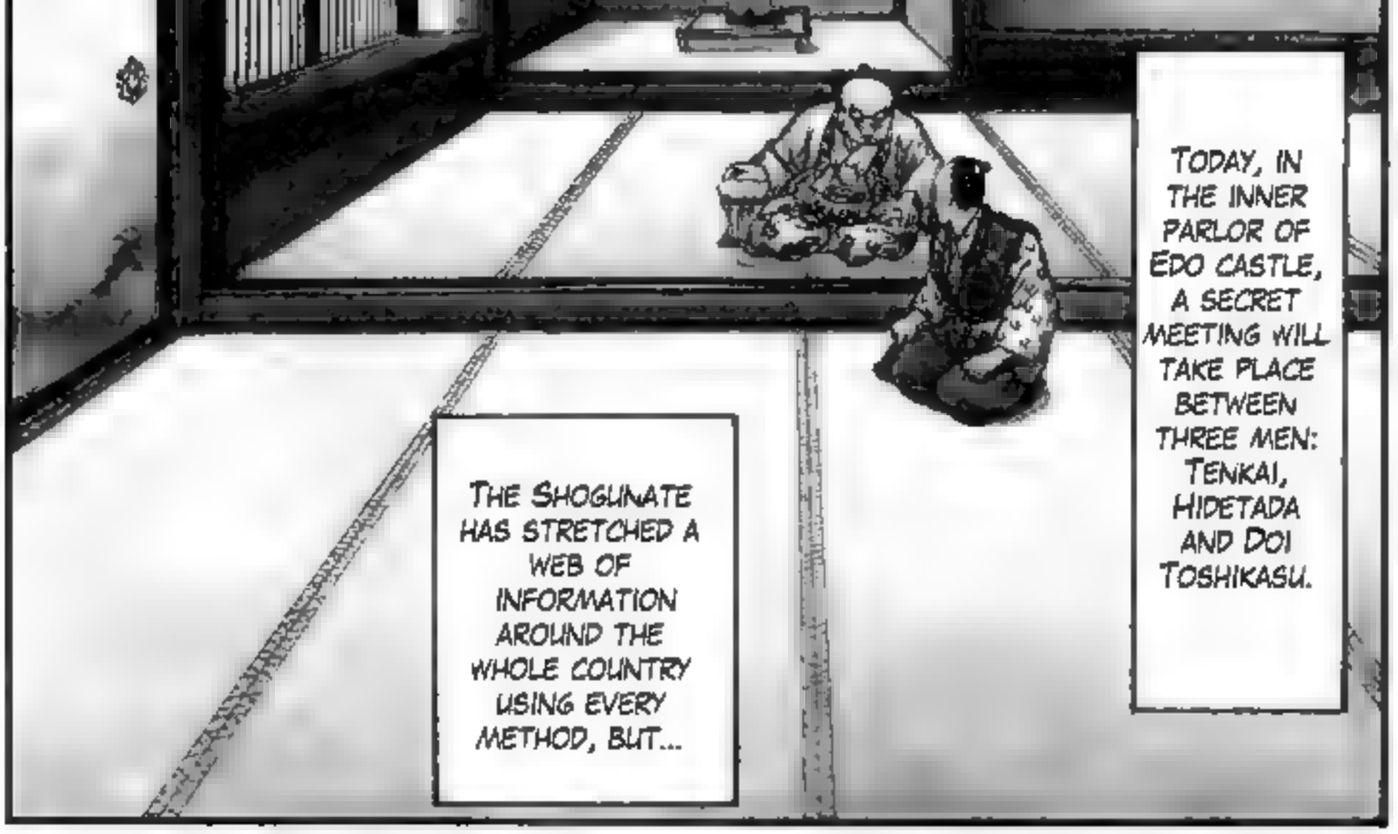
CHAPTER 7: SECRET ORDERS



AZUMI WON THE PATRONAGE OF NONE OTHER THAN TENKAI.
THE SHŌGUN HIMSELF, HIDETADA, WHOSE FATHER WAS ASSASSINATED BY AZUMI ORDERED THAT SHE BE CAUGHT FOR THE SAKE OF THE DIGNITY OF THE SHOGUNATE, BUT...
HIDETADA BECAME AWARE OF THIS INSTANTLY.

QUICKLY RETRACTED THE ORDER TO KILL AZUMI.
SHŌGUN HIDETADA AND DOI TOSHIKATSU, WITHOUT EVER RECEIVING A SINGLE REQUEST FROM TENKAI

TENKAI HAD A CENTRAL ROLE IN PLACING PRESSURE TO BUILD THE TŌSHŌ SHRINE IN NIKKŌ...AND THE FINAL CHOICE OF IEYASU'S POSTHUMOUS SHINTŌ NAME "TŌSHŌ DAIGONGEN", WAS DECIDED UPON DUE TO HIS TIRELESS ADVOCACY.
AT THIS TIME, IEYASU'S BODY WAS TRANSFERRED FROM MT. KUNŌ IN SUNPU AT THE TŌSHŌ SHRINE THAT WAS ERECTED AT NIKKŌ
SO HAD HE BECOME SUCH A MIGHTY AUTHORITY... WHO EVEN THE MOST AUGUST PEOPLE AS HIDETADA HAD DIFFICULTY DEALING WITH?
AND AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL WAS TENKAI.
AFTER HIS DEATH, IEYASU WAS CELEBRATED AS A "GOD" FAR MORE THAN THE SHŌGUN HE HAS BEEN.
OR DID HIDETADA HAVE A DIFFERENT PLAN IN MIND...?
3

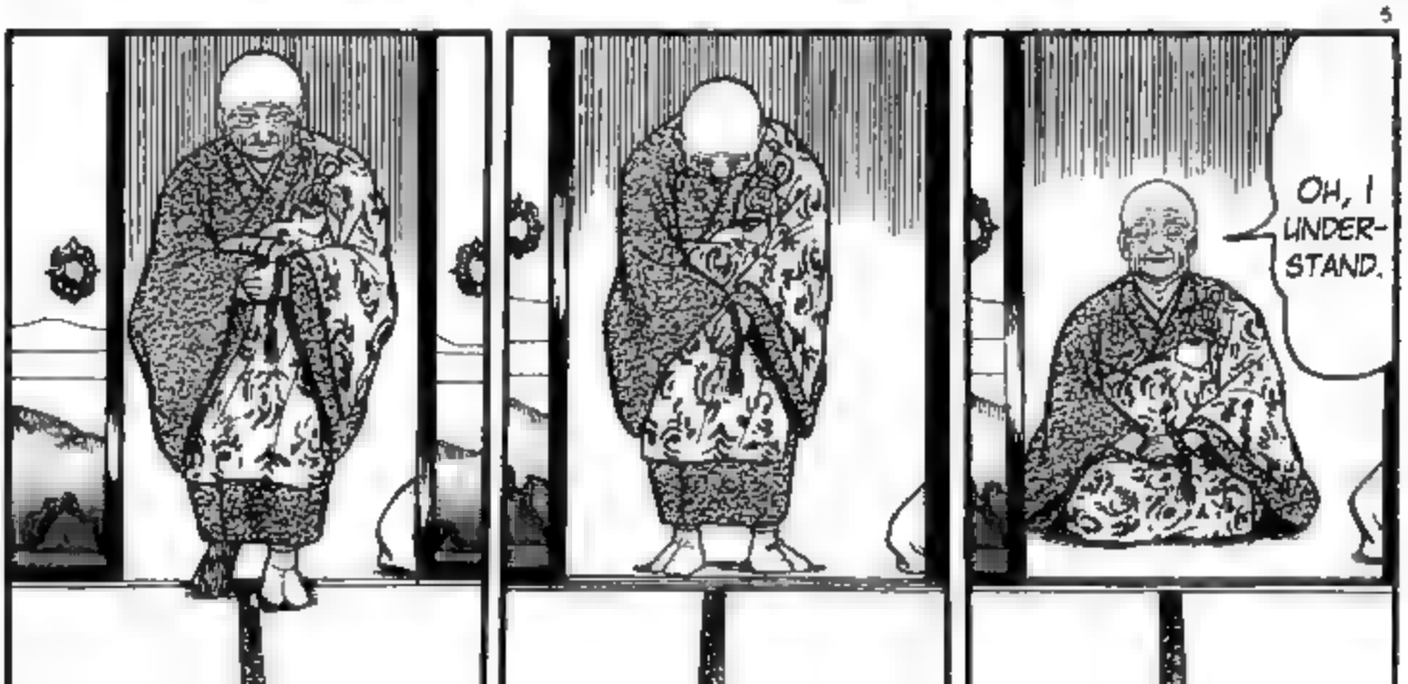

TODAY, IN THE INNER PARLOR OF EDO CASTLE, A SECRET MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE BETWEEN THREE MEN: TENKAI, HIDETADA AND DOI TOSHIKASU.
THE SHOGUNATE HAS STRETCHED A WEB OF INFORMATION AROUND THE WHOLE COUNTRY USING EVERY METHOD, BUT...

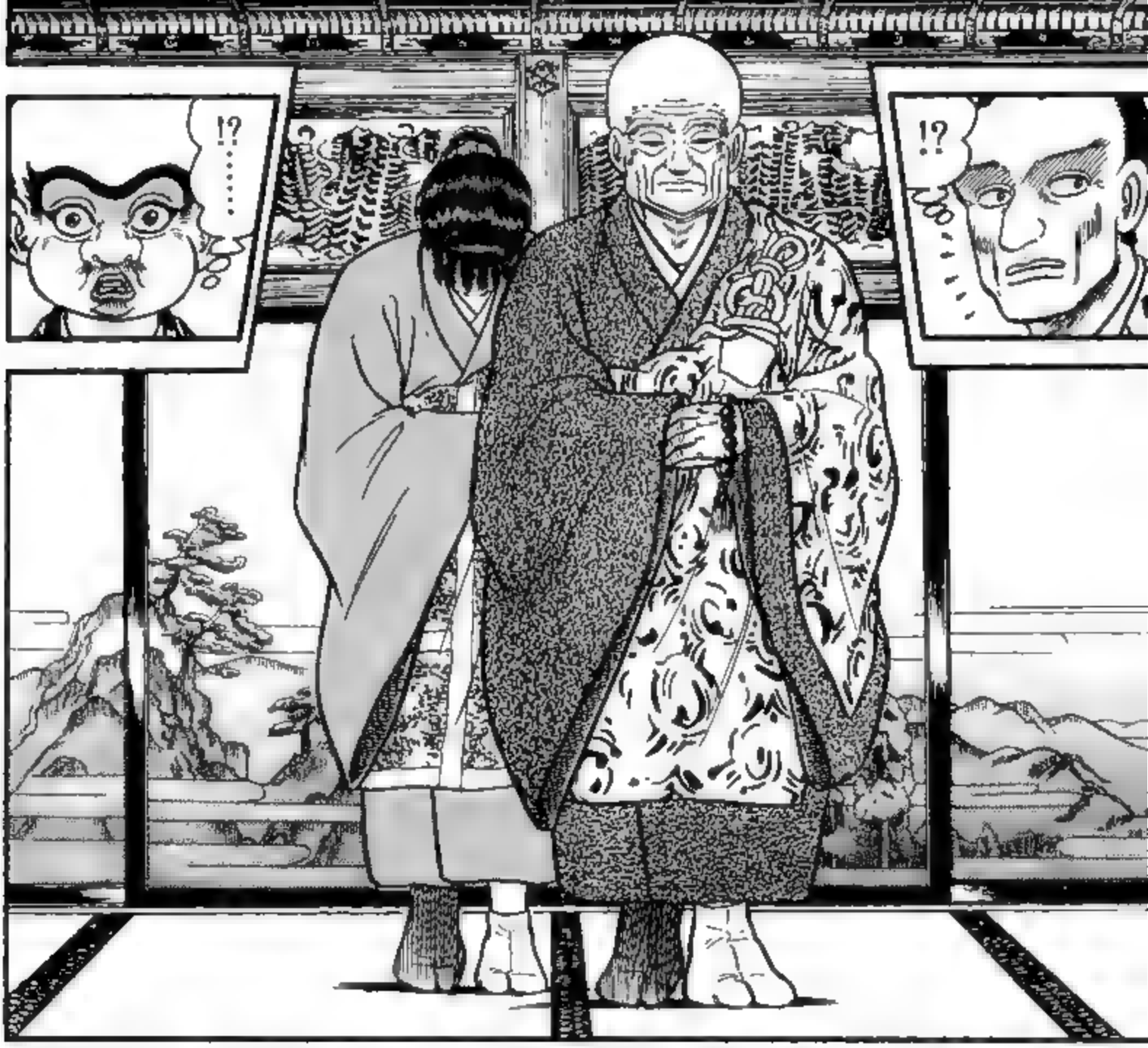
THIS TIME, TENKAI'S PECULIAR WEB OF INFORM-ATION,
CAUGHT WIND OF AN INTRIGUE THAT AIMED TO CAPSIZE THE VERY SHOGUNATE.
THAT IS WHAT THIS SECRET CONFERENCE IS ABOUT.
BECAUSE OF THE SHADOWY PLOT THIS INVOLVED,
HIDETADA MADE MUNE-NORI WAIT IN THE NEXT ROOM.

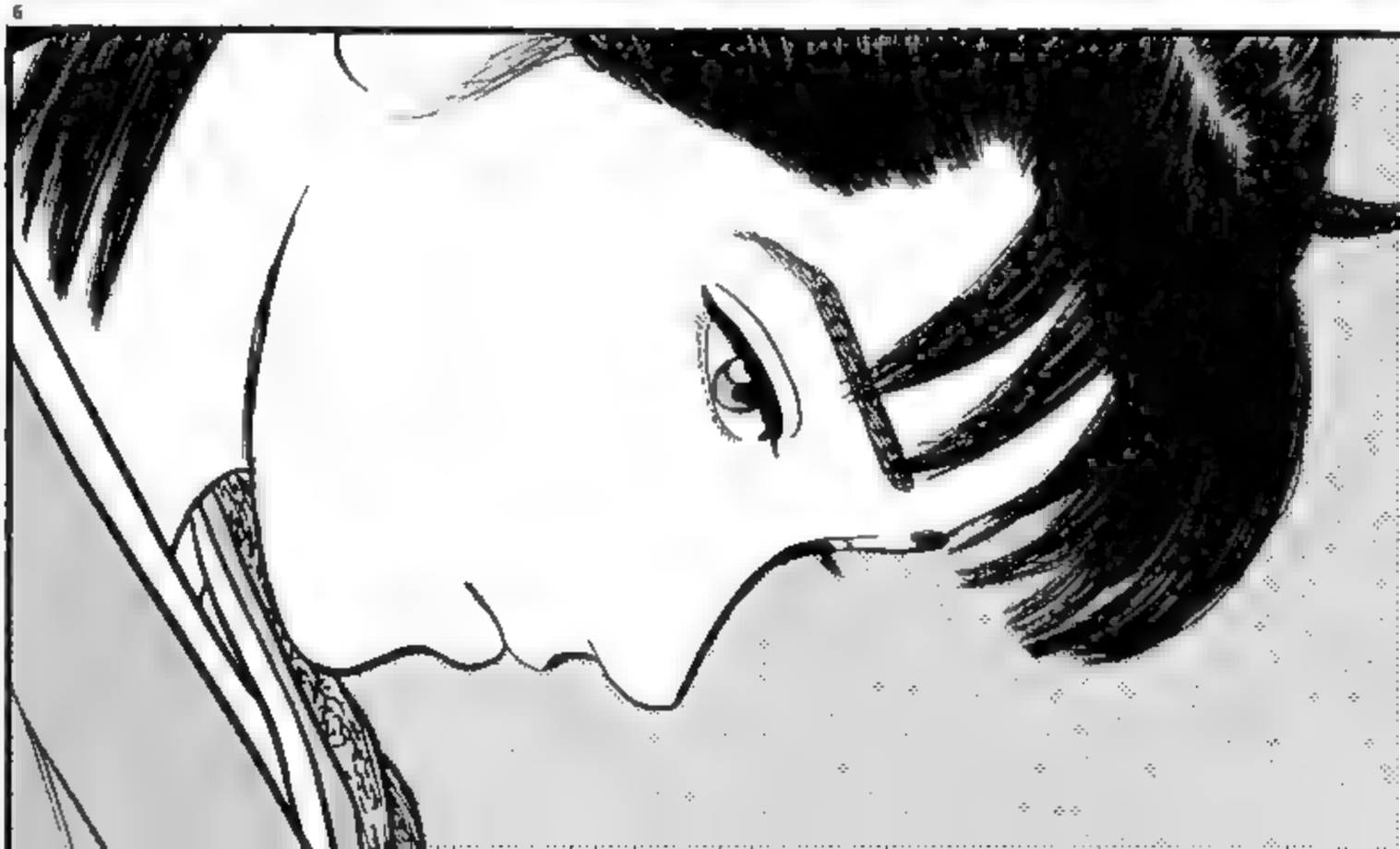
THE HIGH PRIEST HAS ARRIVED!

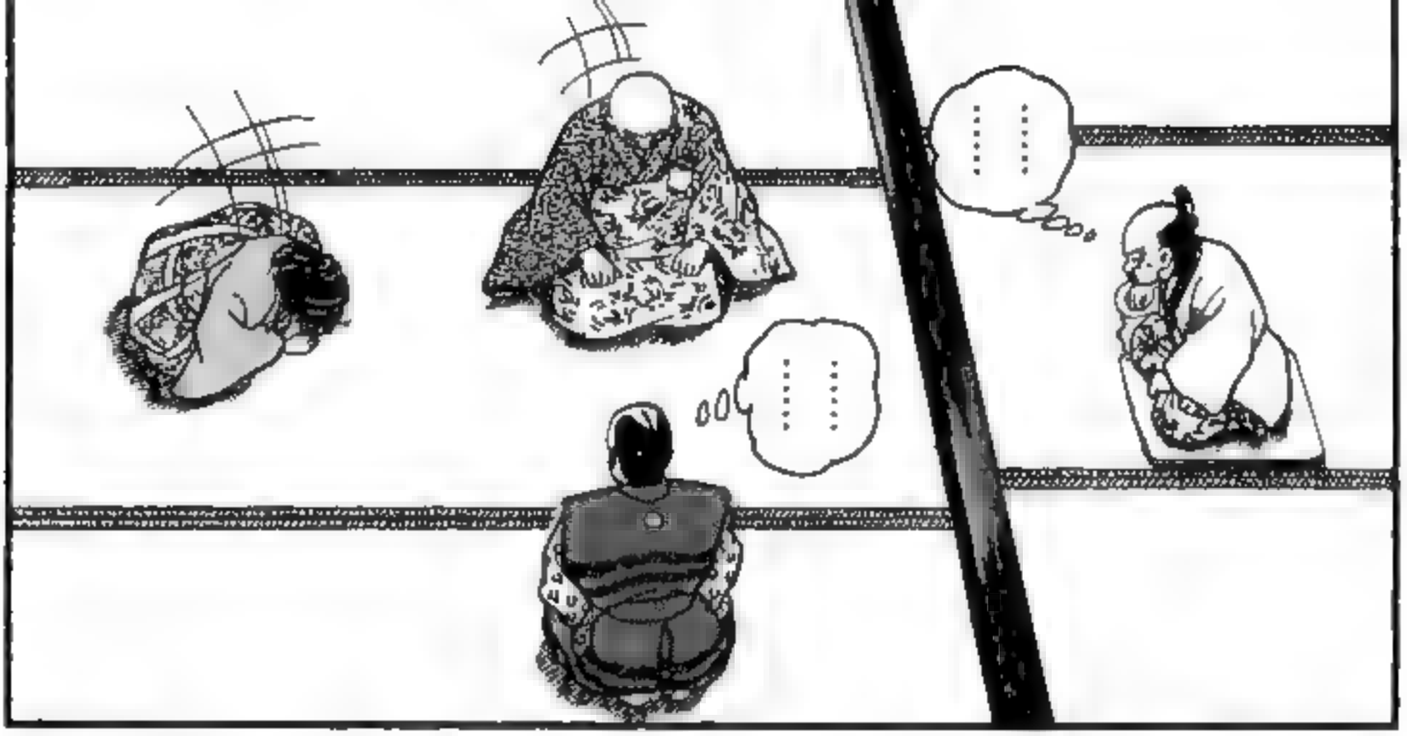
HAVE I KEPT YOU WAITING?
HOW RUDE ON MY PART.

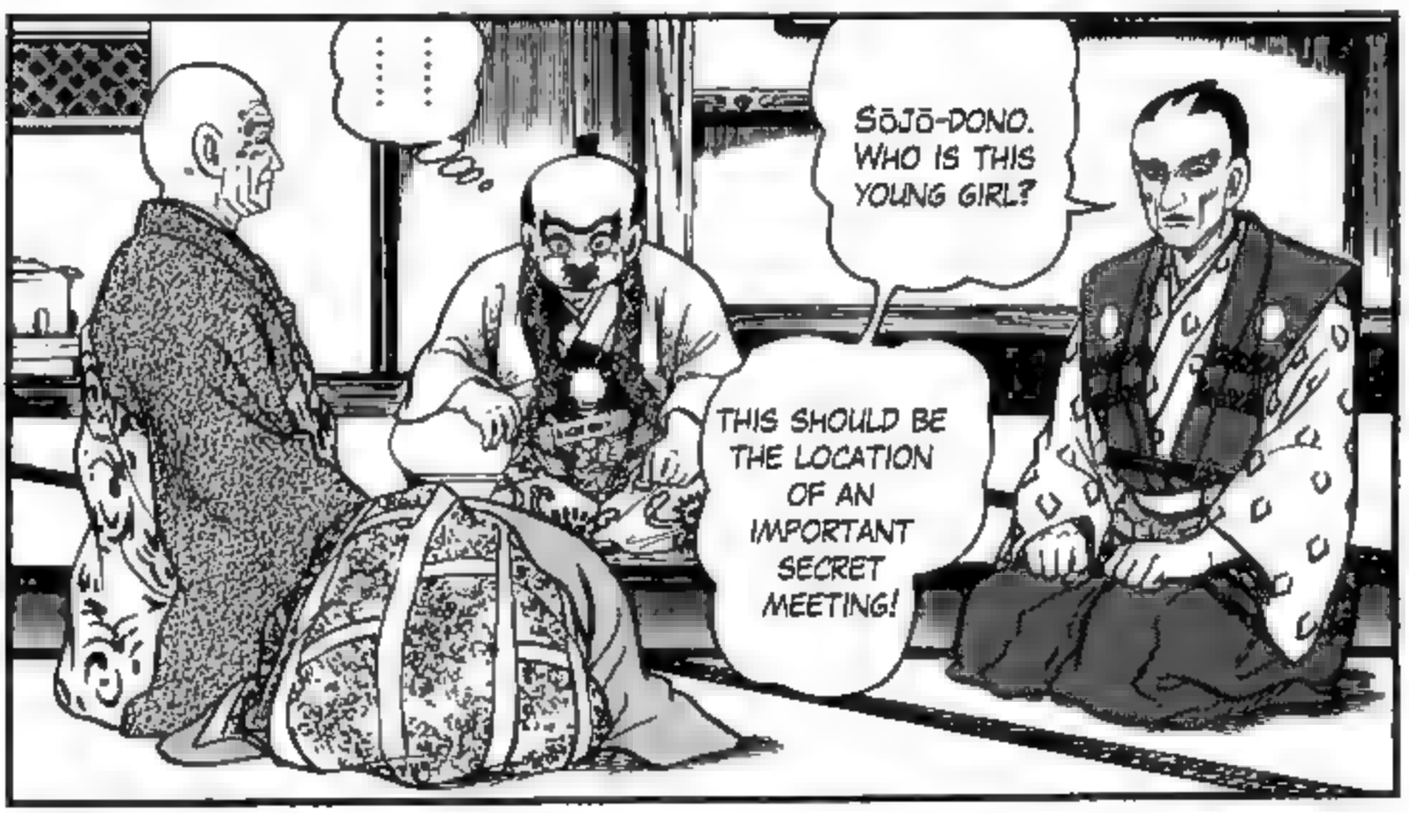
NO, NO, DON'T TROUBLE YOURSELF.
WE WERE THE ONES WHO BEGAN AHEAD OF TIME AND BEGAN DISCUSSING
THE MATTER AT HAND.


OH, I UNDER-STAND.








SŌJŌ-DONO. WHO IS THIS YOUNG GIRL?
THIS SHOULD BE THE LOCATION OF AN IMPORTANT SECRET MEETING!

A YOUNG GIRL...?

!!
SHE'S AZUMI, OF COURSE!

MY NAME IS AZUMI.
.....
!!.....

.....

AZUMI!?

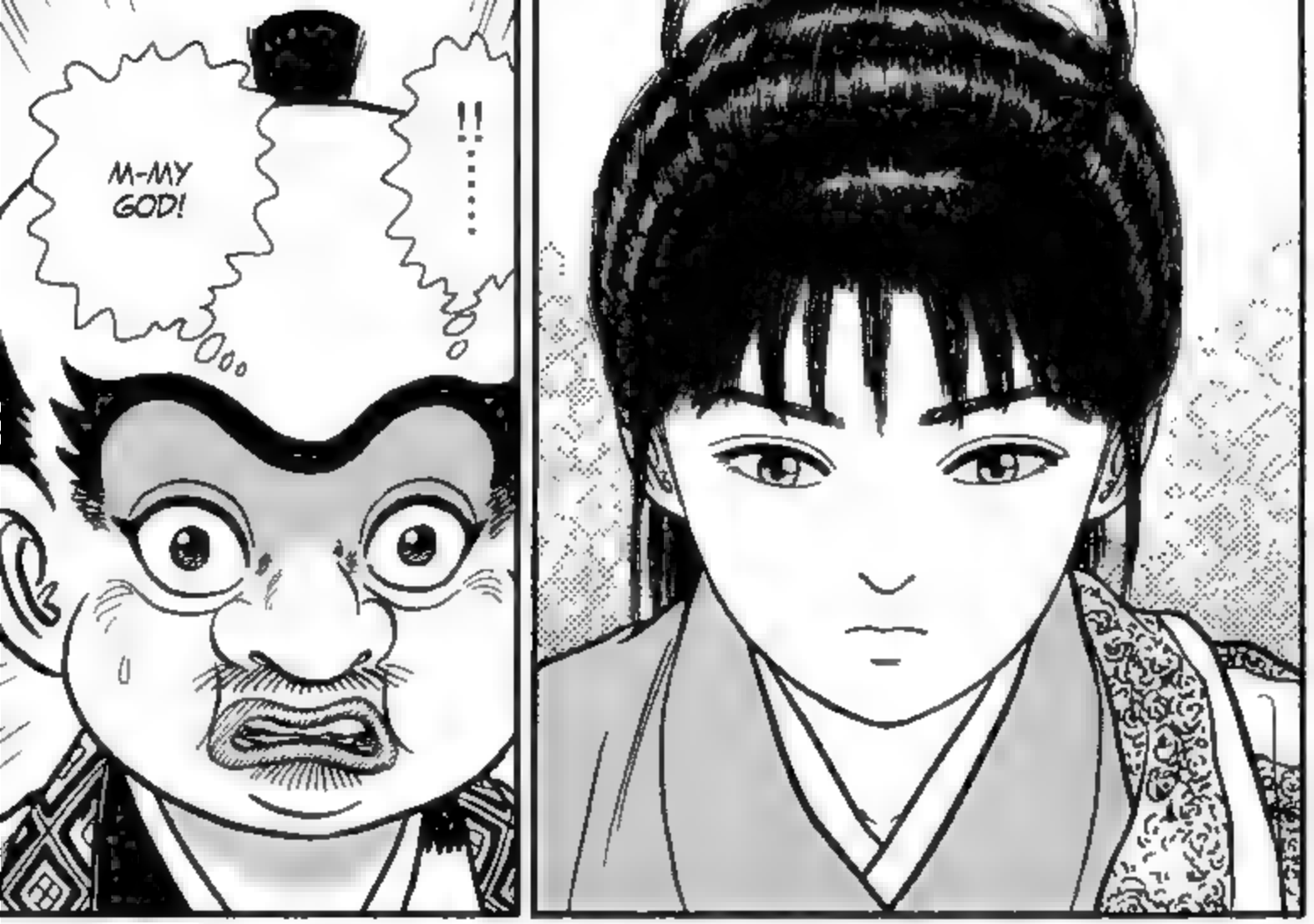
I DO HOPE YOU REMEMBER HER WELL.
TENKAI...
DID HE HEAR EVERYTHING FROM AZUMI!?
DOES HE KNOW ABOUT MY PLOT TO HAVE AZUMI KILL IEYASU!?
IS HE HERE TO ASK FOR ADVICE...!?
ドドド

THIS LITTLE GIRL...THIS IS AZUMI!?
AND TO THINK SHE CAME HERE WITHOUT HESITATION!
TH-THIS GIRL IS AZUMI.

IS THE ASSASSIN WHO SLEW MY VENERABLE FATHER WHEN HE WAS HUNTING!?
THIS LITTLE GIRL...

GIVE ME A VEEEEEEERY GOOD LOOK AT YOU!
RAISE YOUR HEAD AND SHOW ME YOUR FACE!

YES.


M-MY GOD!
!!……

SHE'S BEAUT-IFUL!
TH-THIS CUTE LITTLE GIRL...
SHE'S THE ONE WHO SINGLEHANDEDLY DEFEATED THE FAMED YAGYŪ SWORDSMEN AND SO MANY SKILLED HATOMOTO!?

I THINK THAT AZUMI SHALL BE
THE ONE MOST SUITED TO WORK FOR US
TO CARRY OUT THE TASK WE WILL NOW DISCUSS.
THAT IS WHY I HAVE BROUGHT HER HERE.

……
……
……
ドゥ
ドゥ
ドゥ
ドゥ
……

AZUMI HAS ALREADY HEARD EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT THIS WICKED PLOT TO UPEND THE SHOGUNATE.
IT'S ABOUT ANOTHER MATTER?
IT'S NOT ABOUT ANY SCHEME OF MINE!?
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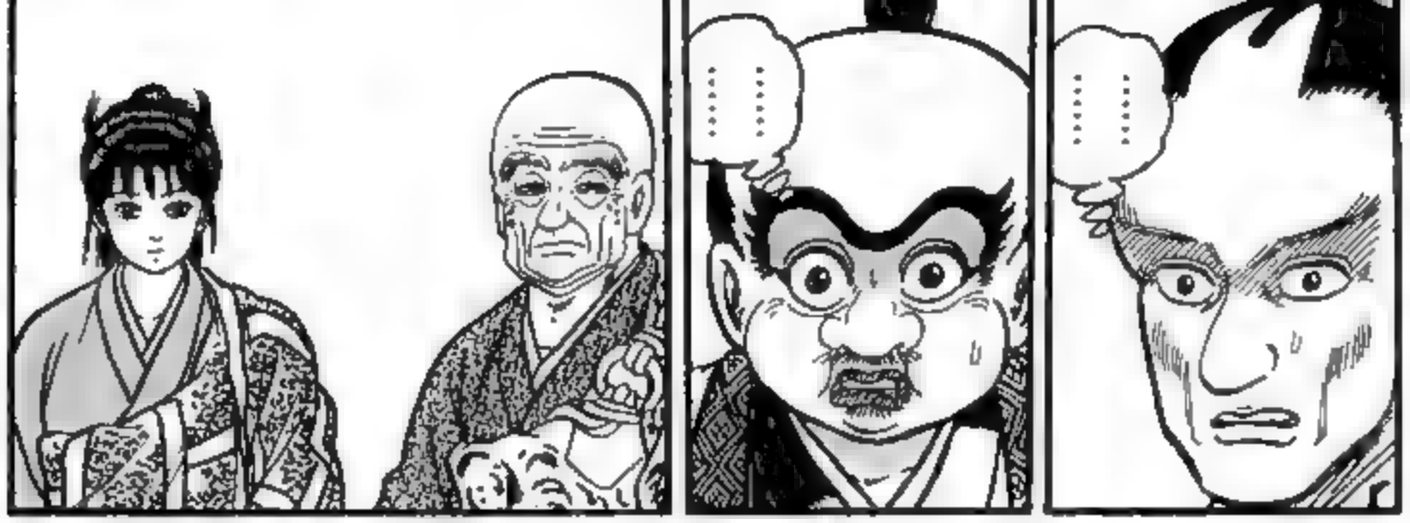
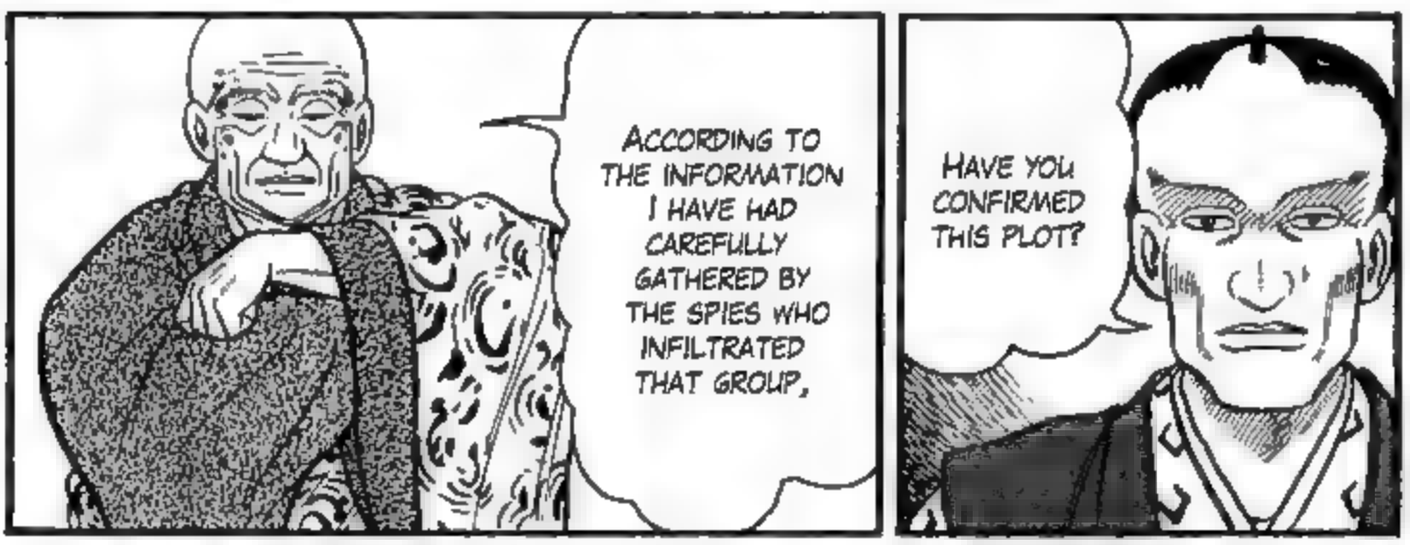
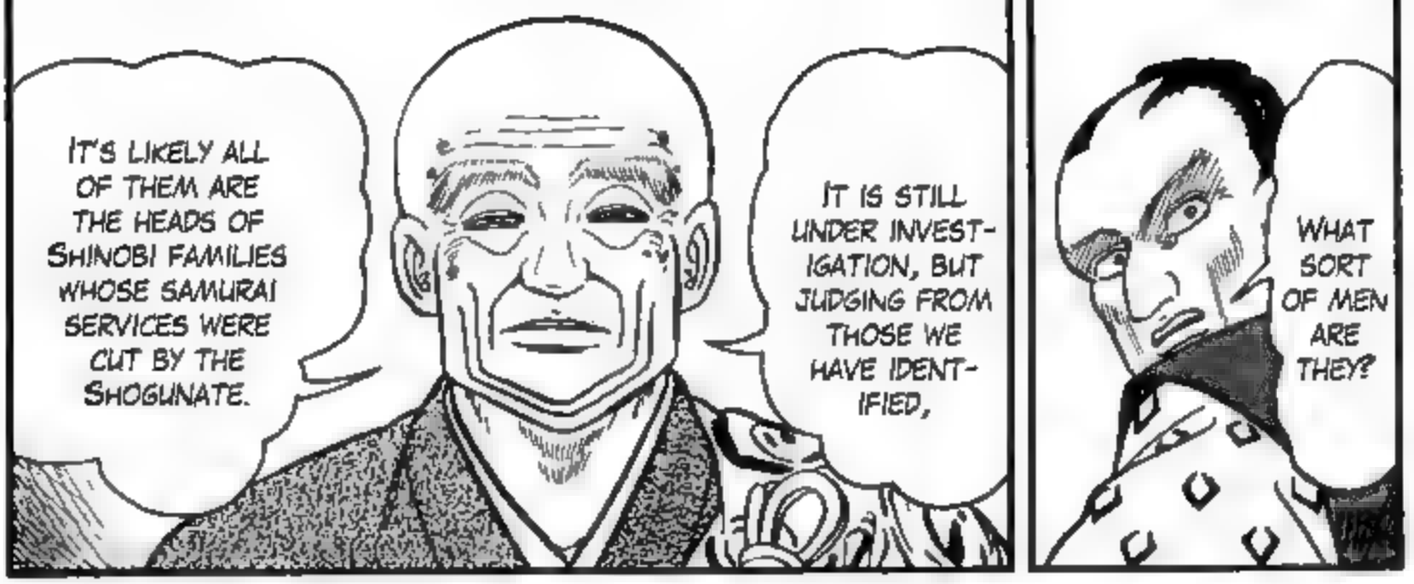
ドゥ
ドゥ
ドゥ
ドゥ



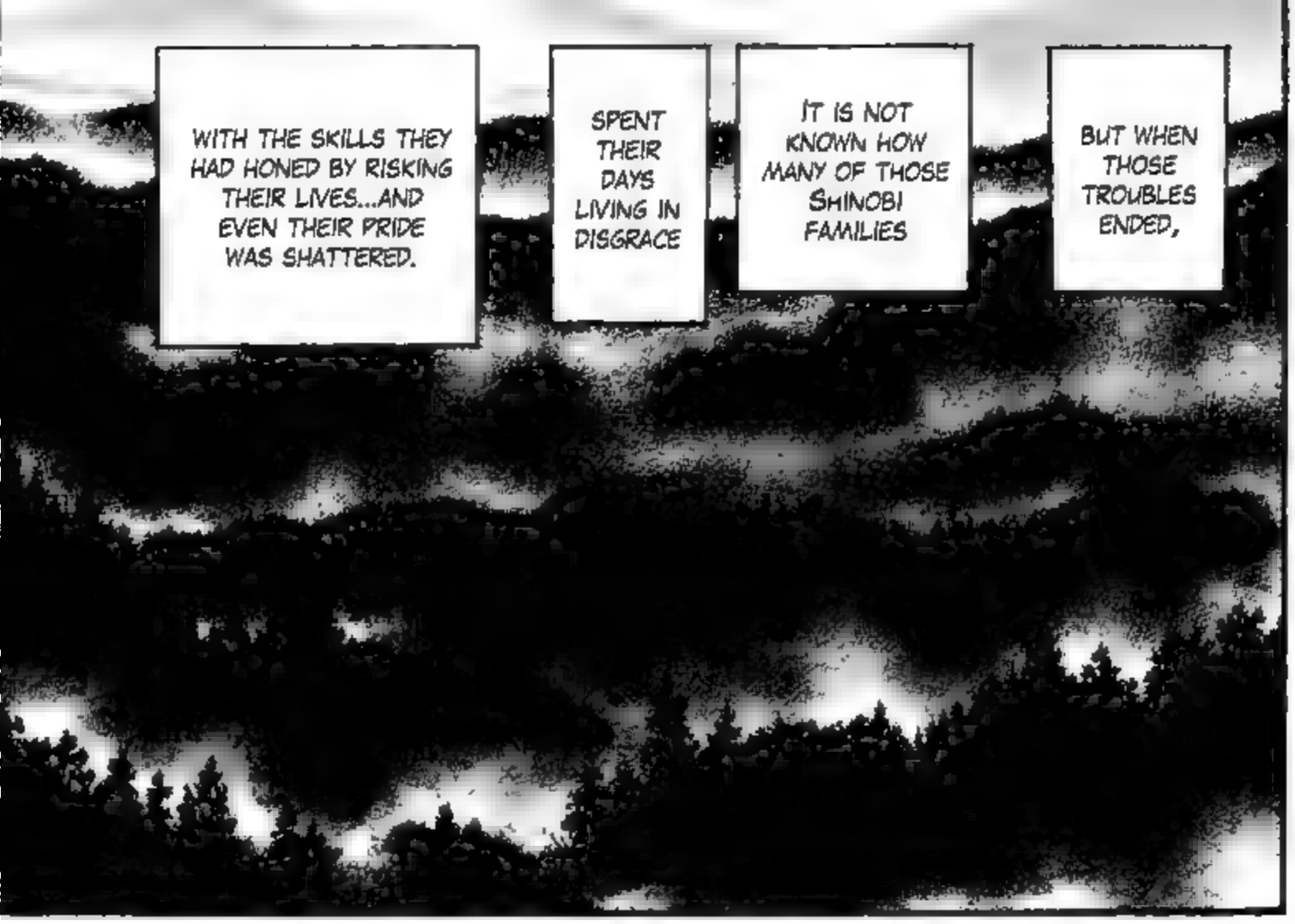

According to the information I have had carefully gathered by the spies who infiltrated that group,
Have you confirmed this plot?

It seems these are the leaders.
Two of them...are daimyō who worked as chief retainers and have a deep grudge toward the shogunate because of the changes in their ranks, but all the others are men I have never heard of...


IT'S LIKELY ALL OF THEM ARE THE HEADS OF SHINOBI FAMILIES WHOSE SAMURAI SERVICES WERE CUT BY THE SHOGUNATE.
IT IS STILL UNDER INVESTIGATION, BUT JUDGING FROM THOSE WE HAVE IDENTIFIED,
WHAT SORT OF MEN ARE THEY?

.....
.....
SHINOBI FAMILIES?

IN TROUBLED TIMES THERE WERE AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF OTHER SHINOBI SCHOOLS WHO SOLD THEIR SERVICES AND WERE EMPLOYED BY MANY DAIMYŌ...
ASIDE FROM THE KŌGA AND IGA...
THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE USED MERCENARY TROOPS FROM THE IGA AND KŌGA NINJA, HOWEVER...

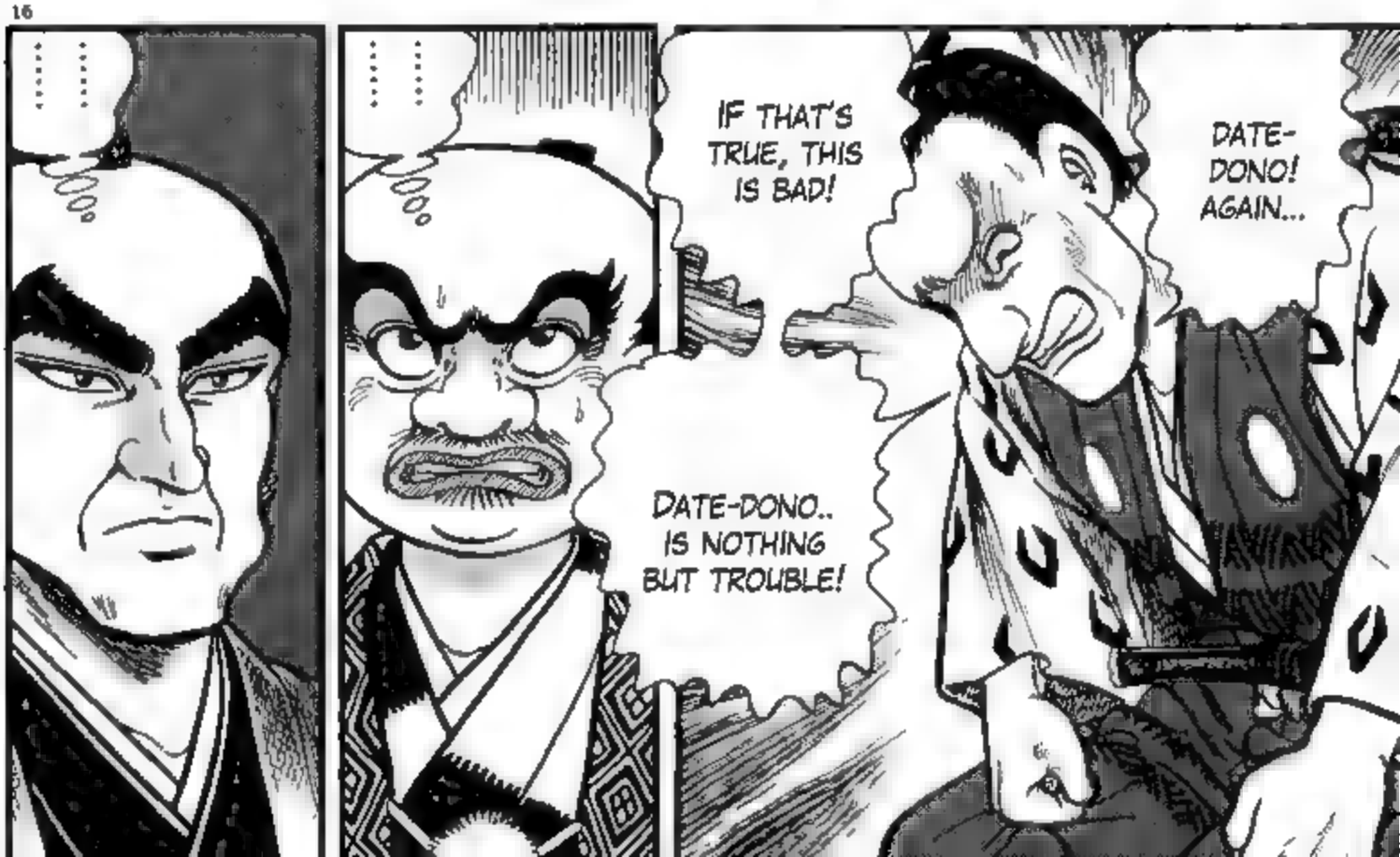

WITH THE SKILLS THEY HAD HONED BY RISKING THEIR LIVES...AND EVEN THEIR PRIDE WAS SHATTERED.
SPENT THEIR DAYS LIVING IN DISGRACE
IT IS NOT KNOWN HOW MANY OF THOSE SHINOBI FAMILIES
BUT WHEN THOSE TROUBLES ENDED,

PLAN TO INFILTRATE EDO CASTLE AND MASSACRE ALL OF THE MOST PROMINENT FIGURES OF THE NATION, BEGINNING WITH WITH SHŌGUN HIDETADA!?
SO YOU SAY THAT... THESE PEOPLE WHO ARE GREATLY UNSATISFIED WITH THE PRESENT STATE OF SOCIETY, RESSENTING THE SHOGUNATE,

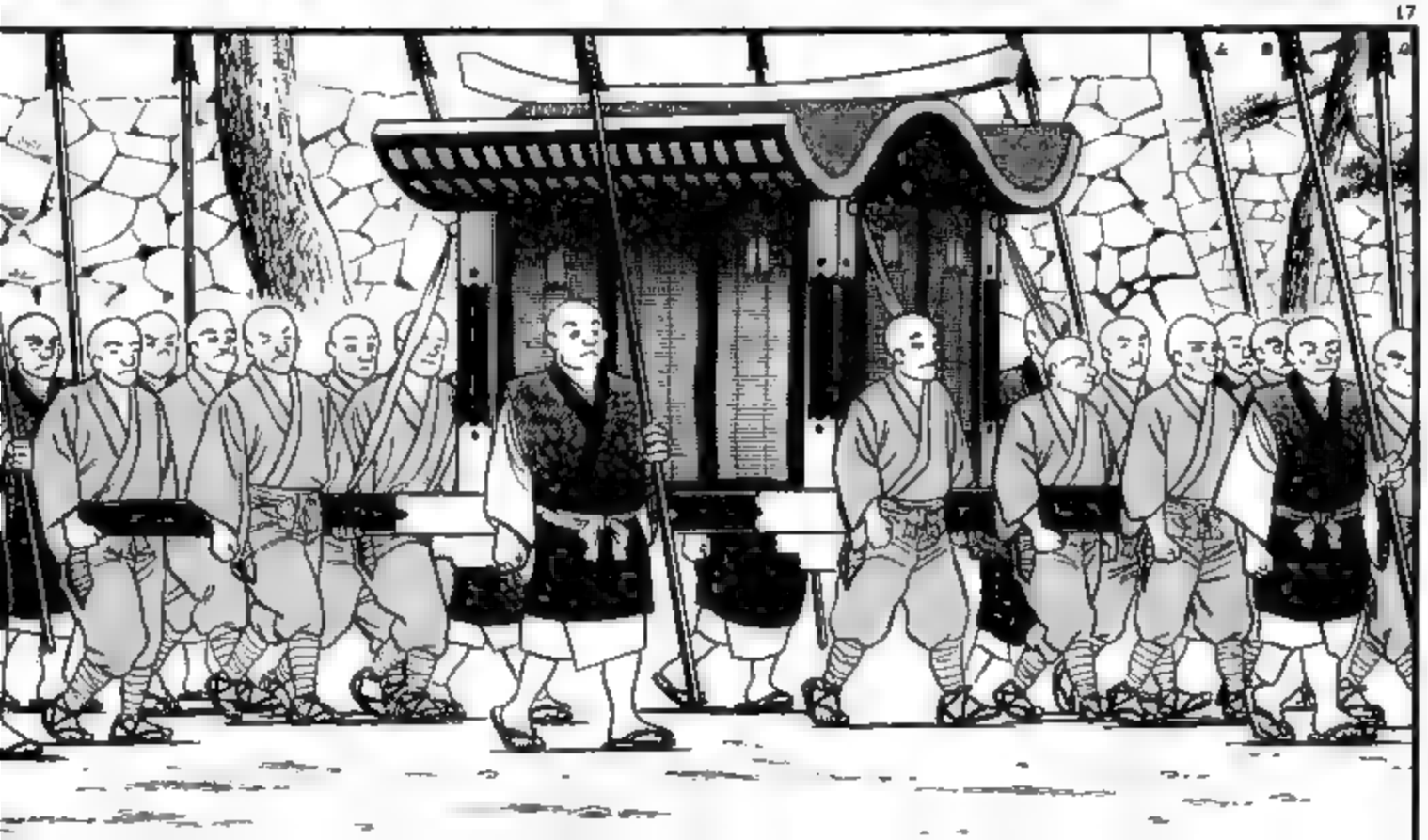
OR THEY PLAN TO SEIZE POWER FOR THEMSELVES.
THEY EITHER WISH TO RETURN TO MORE DEADLY TIMES,

THE FAMOUS ONE-EYED DRAGON, DATE MASAMUNE!?
IS... DATE...
AND YOU SAY THE ONE WHO BROUGHT THEM ALL TOGETHER,

SO IT WOULD SEEM.


.....
.....
IF THAT'S TRUE, THIS IS BAD!
DATE-DONO! AGAIN...
DATE-DONO.. IS NOTHING BUT TROUBLE!

RUMORS OF A REBELLION HEADED BY DATE MASAMUNE
SPARKED AND FADED COUNTLESS TIMES.
BOTH DURING HIDEYOSHI'S ERA,
AS WELL AS IEYASU'S ERA.
MASAMUNE, ALWAYS PREPARED WITH CLEVER TRICKS AND EXCUSES, AVOIDED THE WRATH OF BOTH HIDEYOSHI AND IEYASU EVERY TIME, SURVIVING WITHOUT BEING IMPLICATED AGAIN AND AGAIN.



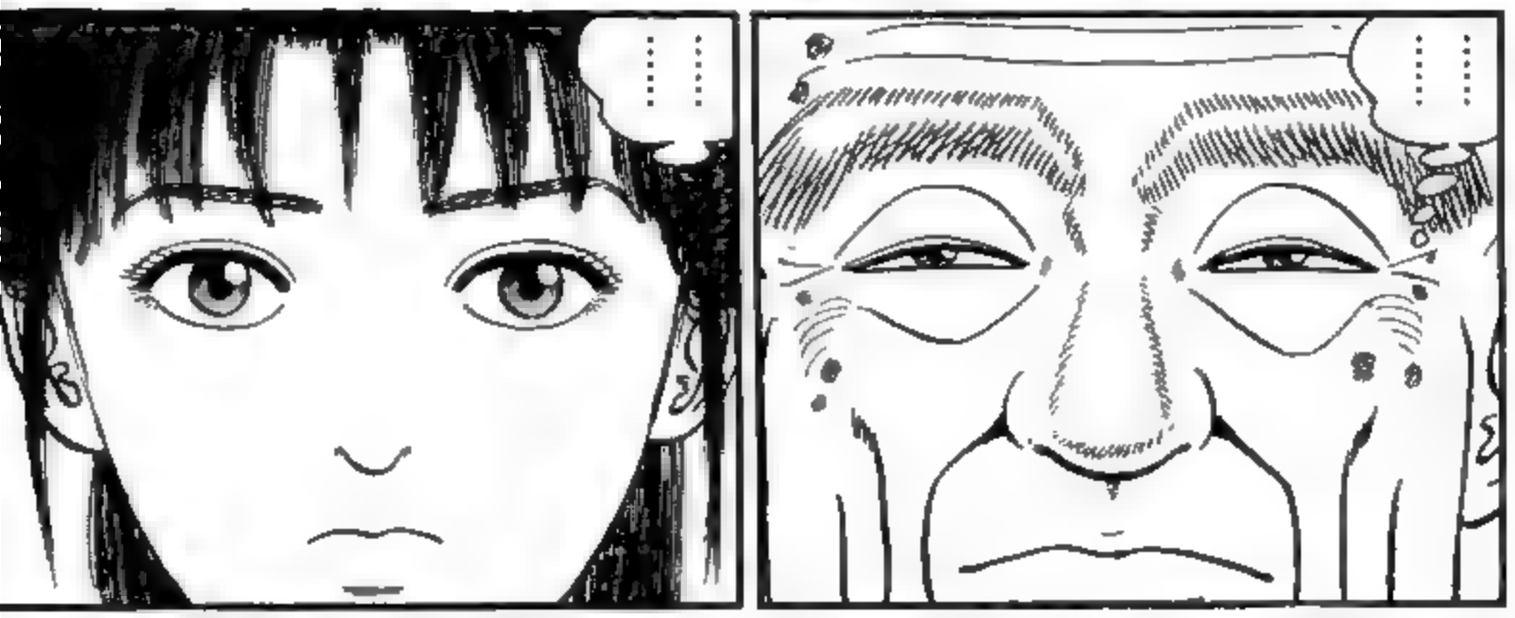
.....
WITH THIS, YOUR LIFE WILL NOT BE IN DANGER THANKS TO YOUR NAME BEING PUBLICLY KNOWN BY SHOGUNATE DECREE!
YOU DID WELL NOT TO HESITATE, AZUMI.

AS EVER, HOLD THIS IN YOUR MIND!
HE MAY SEND ASSASSINS AFTER YOU FROM BEHIND THE SCENES.
BUT...THERE IS YAGYŪ MUNENORI TO CONSIDER.
YES.

HM?
AND THE SHŌGUN AS WELL?
TENKAI-SAMA,

.....

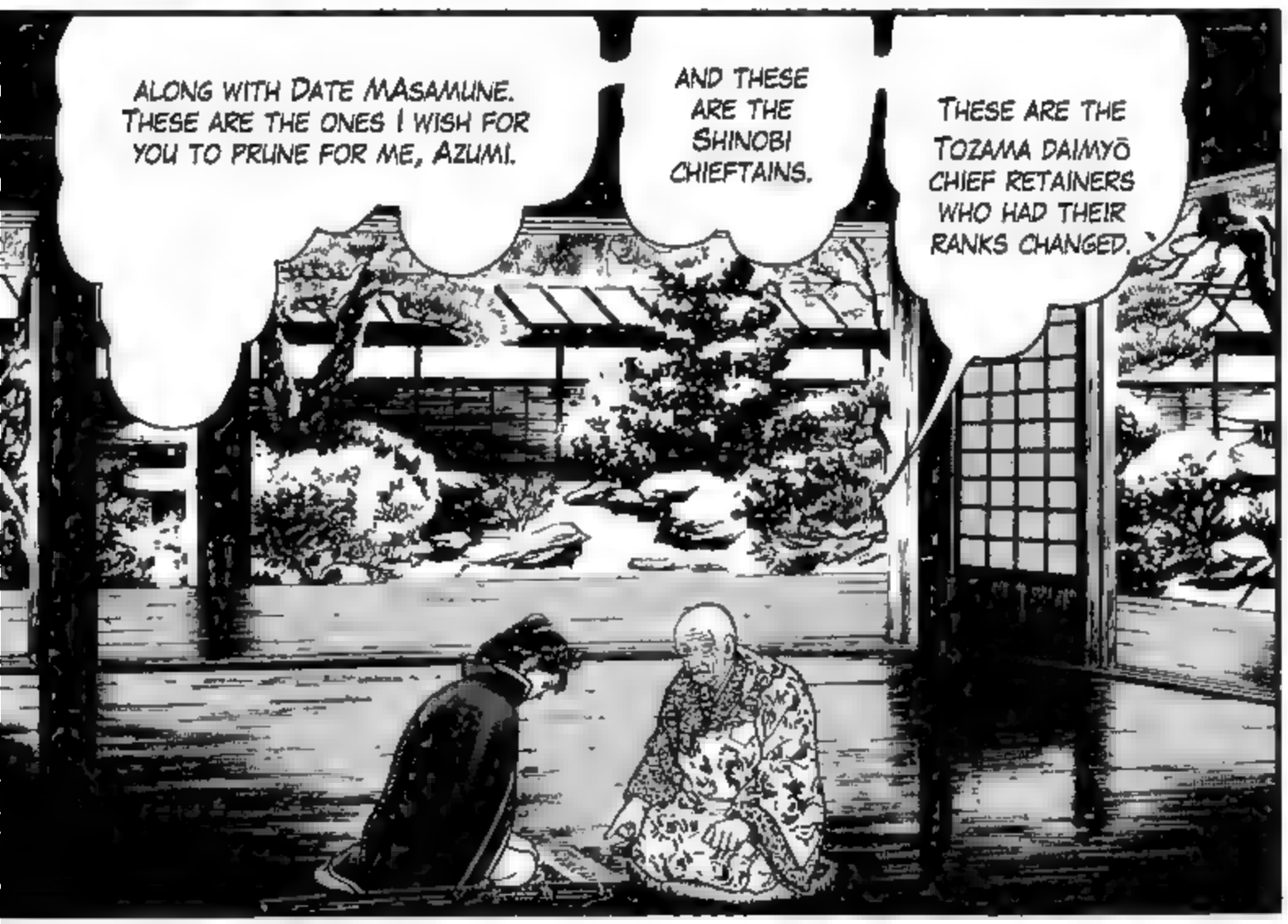
DON'T YOU HATE ME FOR KILLING IEYASU-SAMA!?
DON'T YOU WISH TO PUNISH ME? OR EXECUTE ME FOR THIS DEED?

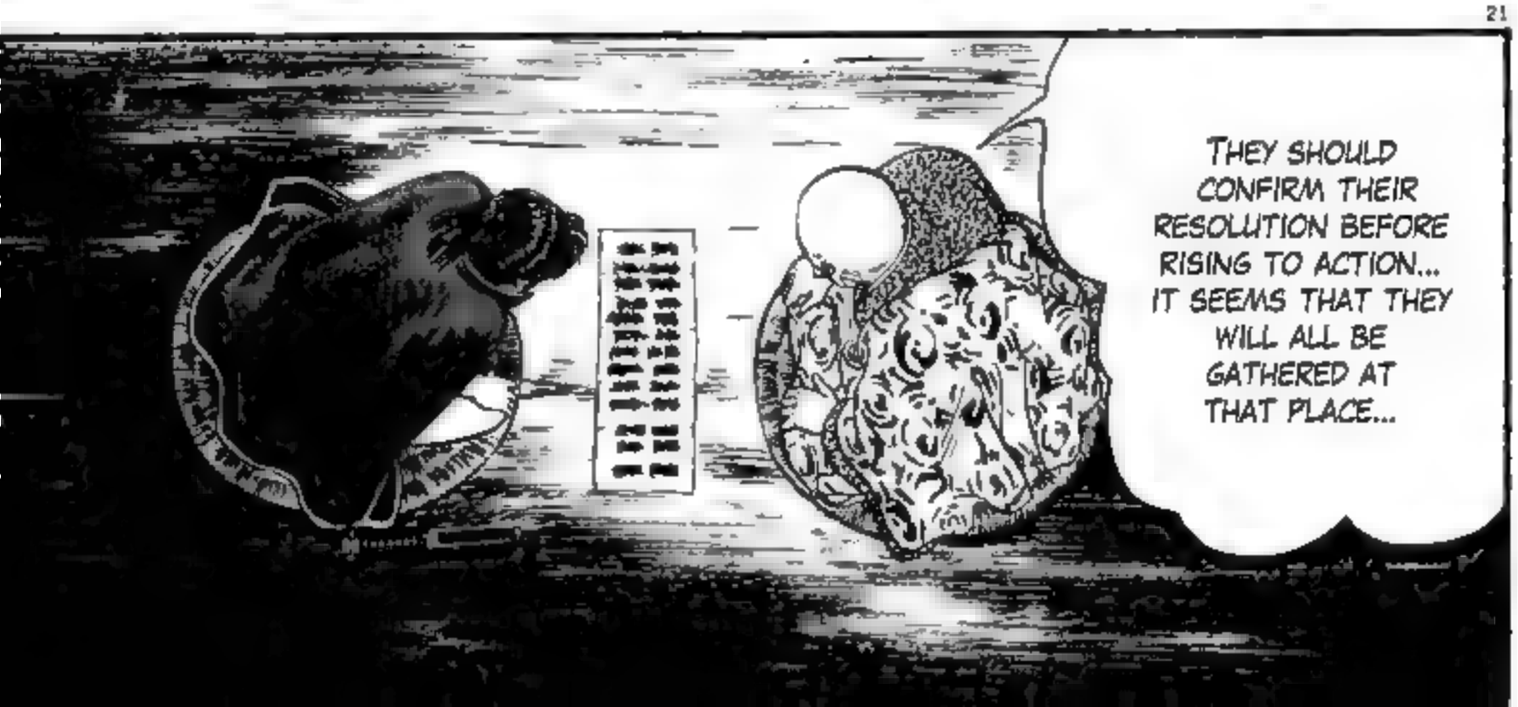

.....
.....

SIN TO A GREATER OR LESSER EXTENT.
ALL PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD

OR A GREAT ATONEMENT FOR A GREAT CRIME,
WITH A SMALL ATONE-MENT FOR A SMALL CRIME,
TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF SOCIETY
AFTER THEY ATONE WORKING TO BE OF USE
THAT IS WHY
YOU HAVE BEEN INV-ALUABLE TO OUR SOCIETY!
YOU, AZUMI, HAVE SPENT YOUR DAYS WORKING TO COMPLETE TRULY VITAL MISSIONS.
A PLOT THAT SEEKS TO TAKE US BACK TO THE MOST TURBULENT TIMES.
THAT HAS BEEN BUILT UPON TEN THOUSANDS HONORED CORPSES.
YOU MUST THWART ANOTHER PLOT TO RUIN OUR PEACEFUL SOCIETY,
AND YOUR PRESENT MISSION IS A TRULY VITAL ONE!
IF YOU CARRY IT OUT FLAW-LESSLY,

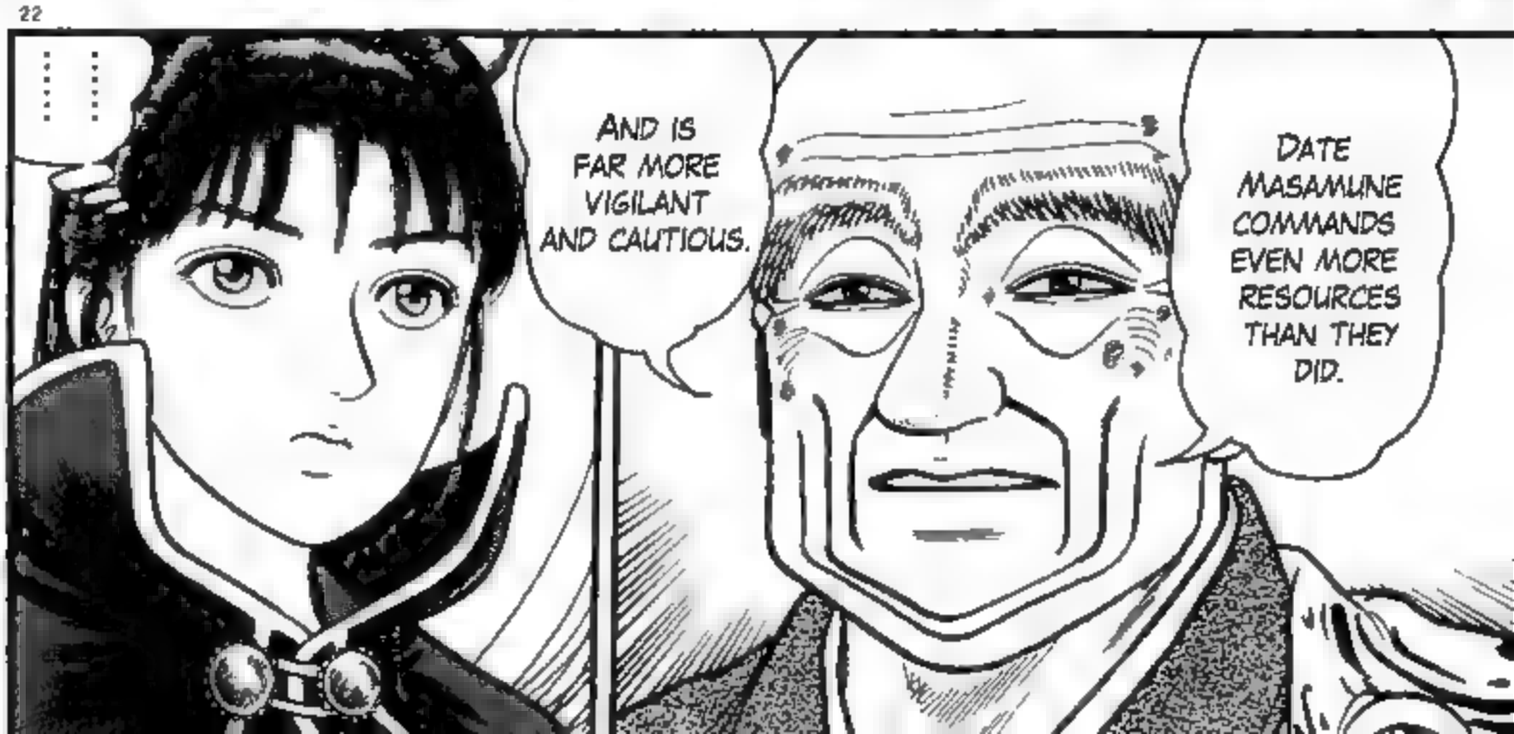
.....
YOUR TRUE ATONEMENT FOR YOUR GRAVE CRIME!
EVEN SHŌGUN HIDETADA WILL BE FORCED TO RECOGNIZE


ALONG WITH DATE MASAMUNE. THESE ARE THE ONES I WISH FOR YOU TO PRUNE FOR ME, AZUMI.
AND THESE ARE THE SHINOBI CHIEFTAINS.
THESE ARE THE TOZAMA DAIMYŌ CHIEF RETAINERS WHO HAD THEIR RANKS CHANGED.


THEY SHOULD CONFIRM THEIR RESOLUTION BEFORE RISING TO ACTION... IT SEEMS THAT THEY WILL ALL BE GATHERED AT THAT PLACE...

IS VERY STRONG!
THEIR CENTRAL FIGURE, DATE MASAMUNE,

PREVIOUSLY, YOU FLAWLESSLY PRUNED
MILITARY COMMANDERS LIKE ASANO NAGAMASA AND KATŌ KIYOMASA, HOWEVER...

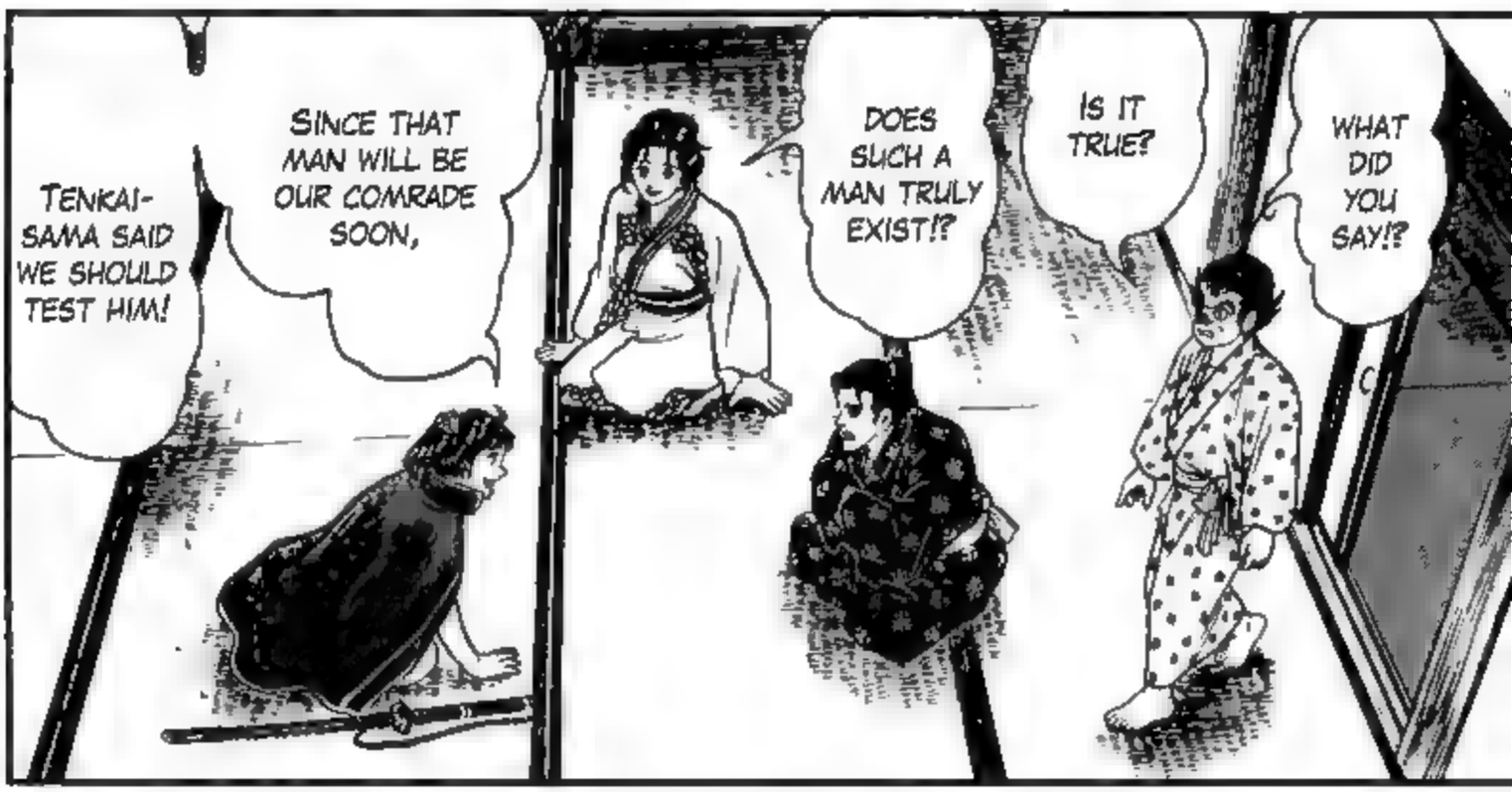

AND IS FAR MORE VIGILANT AND CAUTIOUS.
DATE MASAMUNE COMMANDS EVEN MORE RESOURCES THAN THEY DID.

I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY!
HO HO HO.
UHM...

I KNEW IT!
HAH HAH HAH!
YES.
YOU WANT TO ASK WHAT YOU SHOULD DO TO FIND THEM OUT AT THAT PLACE? THOSE MEN WHOSE FACES YOU DON'T KNOW?

THAT VERY PERSON HAD INFILTRATED THESE TROUBLEMAKERS A LONG TIME AGO. WHILE HE INVESTIGATED, HE CAUGHT WIND OF THIS PLOT AND HE GLIMPSED THE FACES OF THOSE LEADERS!
ON THIS MISSION YOU, TOBI-ZARU, KAGARI AND HATSUNE WILL BE JOINED BY A NEW COMRADE.
HE'LL BE ARRIVING SHORTLY.

HIS INJURIES WERE IN THE PROCESS OF HEALING.
EVEN THOUGH HE WAS INJURED, TOBIZARU CRAWLED UP FROM THAT VALLEY AND CAME BACK TO EDO WITH KAGARI AND HATSUNE FIVE DAYS LATER THAN AZUMI.


TENKAI-SAMA SAID WE SHOULD TEST HIM!
SINCE THAT MAN WILL BE OUR COMRADE SOON,
DOES SUCH A MAN TRULY EXIST!?
IS IT TRUE?
WHAT DID YOU SAY!?

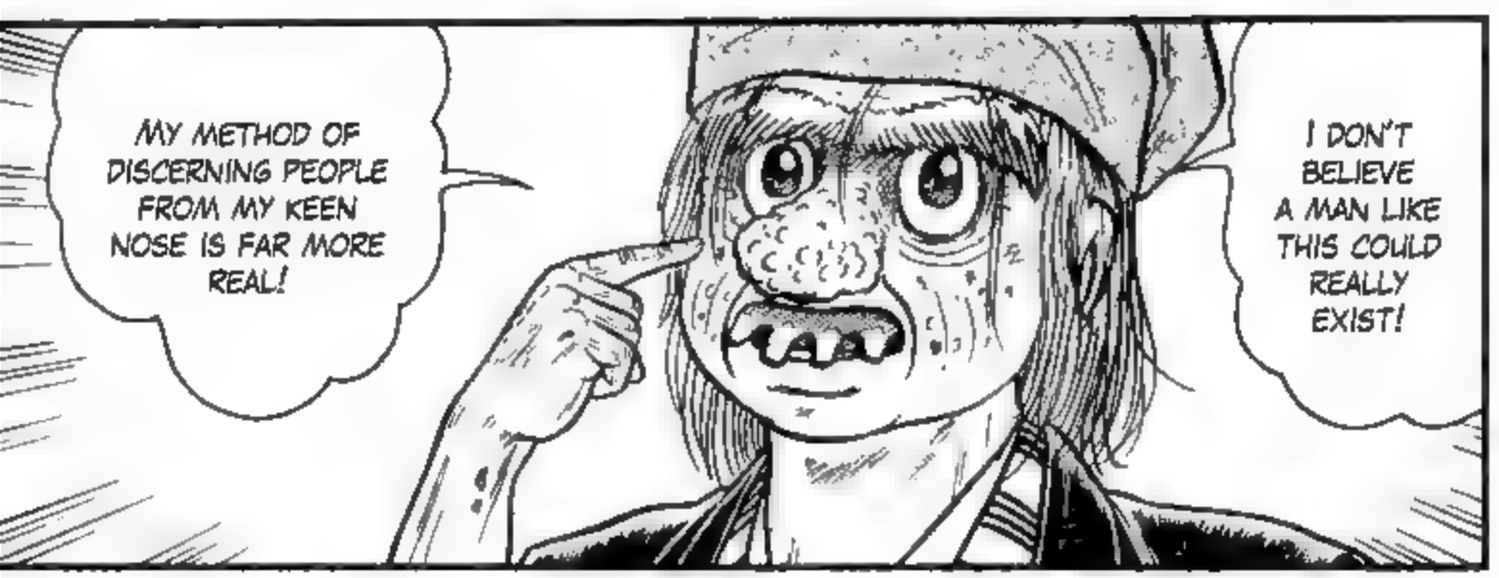
LET'S HAVE A MATCH TO SEE WHO DOESN'T GET FOUND OUT!
HEHEHEHE! SOUNDS LIKE FUN!
THAT SOUNDS FUN! LET'S TEST HIM THEN!

EVEN IF HE ONLY SEES THE EYES IN SOMEONE'S FACE FOR AN INSTANT, HE REMEMBERS THEM PRECISELY, NEVER FORGETTING THEM.
THAT MAN WHO WILL BECOME YOUR COMRADE,
SUCH A MAN IS NOW COMING.
ANY PERSON IN AN INSTANT, NO MATTER WHAT DISGUISE THEY MAY WEAR OR THE ASPECT THEY ASSUME!
HE IS SAID TO HAVE THE ABILITY TO SEE THROUGH AND RECOGNIZE

I WAS THINKING YOU'D COME LOOKING LIKE THAT!
YOU, TOO! I WAS EXPECTING THAT!

MWAH MWAH HAH... YOU'RE SO NAIVE. YOURS CAN'T EVEN BE CALLED DISGUISES.
I WIN!
T-TOBI-ZARU!?

ANYWAY, THIS MAN WHO'S COMING SHOULD BE FINE EVEN IF I SHOWED HIM MY FACE FOR AN INSTANT, RIGHT!?
AREN'T PEOPLE ON PILGRIMAGE HERE!?
I CAN'T BECOME A BUDDHIST PRIEST DUE TO MY HAIR.
BUT, WE SAID TO DISGUISE AS PEOPLE FROM THIS COMPOUND, SO THE CHOICE WAS LIMITED.
THEN, AFTER I DISGUISED MYSELF AS AN OLD MAN OF THIS COMPOUND, IT'S SAID THAT THIS GUY COULD SEE THROUGH ME IN A MOMENT, RIGHT!?


MY METHOD OF DISCERNING PEOPLE FROM MY KEEN NOSE IS FAR MORE REAL!
I DON'T BELIEVE A MAN LIKE THIS COULD REALLY EXIST!

GIVEN HER HAIR AND THE COLOR OF HER EYES, NO MATTER WHAT DISGUISE SHE CHOOSES, IT'LL BE A LITTLE OBVIOUS.
ISN'T AZUMI-CHAN HERE YET?

NO WAY!
WHA-
HUH!?
A-AZUMI-CHAN!?!?!
FOR REAL!?

I'F SHT-UFFED
TOO MUSH COTTON IN MY MOUSH AND I CAN'T SH-PEAK...

WAHAH HAHAHA HAHAHA!
DAMMIIIIT! WE LOST!
IS THAT REALLY YOU, AZUMI!? DAMN YOU!

SHOOOO! I UOOOON, WIIIIGHT!?
EHEHE HEHEHE!

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